

The LIVES *and* DEATHS *of*
ROLAND GREER



THE story of a boy who is dominated all his life by two outside forces—Male and Female. His soul becomes the warring ground of other people's desire for domination, while his emotional nature becomes so warped and sensitized that he develops various "lives" with different people. Sometimes it is a life under masculine domination, sometimes under feminine domination, and sometimes it is the life of a spiritual hermaphrodite, where the masculine and feminine are fighting for control. The least lived and important "life" is his very own. This poor, neurotic soul is stirringly laid bare by a master of psychology. The conscious and unconscious forces at work in the lives of Roland Greer are uncompromisingly set forth.

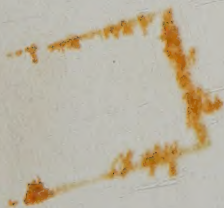
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—*Hugh Walpole.*

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THE LIVES AND DEATHS
OF ROLAND GREER





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RICHARD PYKE

THE
Lives and Deaths
OF
ROLAND
GREER



1929

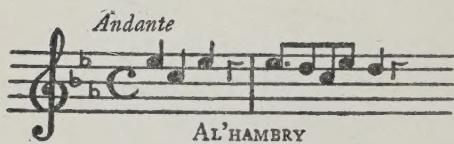
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*"We are what we are
because we have been
what we have been."*

S. F.



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PART I

CHILDE ROLAND

I

A LITTLE boy leaned out of the window in a station omnibus as it was slackening its pace, and said in a timid voice to an old man panting along just outside:

"You are not wanted, thank you; will you please go away?"

Since the runner continued to follow without taking any notice of this request, a lad, who looked about thirteen years old, put his head out and repeated it.

Daniel Greer put one hand on his younger brother's knee and the other on the edge of the window, leaning forward to give his words the necessary sternness, and to see better through the darkness whether the wretched, workless creature was giving up his pursuit. Daniel was not performing this kindly act by inclination, but because he was frightened of a woman, who was sitting next to him. She was his mother.

She never would let beggars off the street help to carry luggage. She always had it done by the commissioner who hung about at the bottom of the road. This man—"Monsieur Canaire," as the little boy, Roland, the youngest of this Francophil Jewish family, called him—was an essential part of every holiday to the latter's mind. For Roland most experiences and events could be interpreted

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in terms of their reactions on his mother: whether they made her angry, loving, sneering, or raving; stern, chaffing, tired, tiresome, or happy.

The holidays were accompanied for him at each stage by definite changes of atmosphere. As the departure became imminent, the horrid routine of normal life was suspended; partly because rooms were being shut up, so that he had to take his meals with his elders instead of in the nursery, and partly because the nurse, or governess, and his mother were too busy to look after him.

He was thrilled when his mother made one of her rare expeditions into the country alone to inspect houses for the holidays, and returned in good temper from having found something cheap, and responsive to his affection and caresses. He was almost conscious that these kindnesses of his were less spontaneous expressions of love than propitiatory acts intended to smother rising ill-temper in his mother, and, if she came home tired, change her before she had time to grumble or snarl into a happy, because demonstratively loved, mother.

He felt, too, and rightly, that in this matter of houses for the holidays he was able to share in the deliberations of his mother and brother and sisters, although the youngest, as their equal, for his tastes received as serious consideration as theirs. His mother even accepted so naturally the opinions contributed by her children in this matter that he was secure from her laughter. Generally she seemed incapable of not reminding him gratuitously, irrelevantly, or relevantly, that he was the youngest, the

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baby, her baby, and a baby, and she would evoke his opinions only, apparently, in order to explode them. These decisions about the holidays were the solitary exception.

Once, not many years ago, Myra Greer had been young, pretty, wife to a famous man, in whom, for whom, alone she lived. Now she was a red-faced woman nearing middle-age, dressed badly in black, and with holes in the heels of her stockings. A family of four, an income—one-tenth of what it had been—of three figures, a desperate pride which alone prevented her accepting help from relations whom she disliked, these were what she was left in life. The unhappiness of her own childhood, its jealousies and hatreds, and the literary in-education of a Victorian Miss, had left her at the mercy of strong passions, which had never been more than damped during her husband's life. Now, that anodyne destroyed, the poison of spiritual and material calamity combined was inflaming her to the point where every incident was an effect, and then as indelible a cause. What had been even in favourable circumstances a hasty temper and a shrew's tongue were transformed by grief, a sense of isolation, and a hatred for all women who were not bereaved, into savage misogyny and a lashing speech that knew nothing of conventions.

She had been carried, ten days after her child was born, into the presence of her husband, whom she loved, when he was ten hours away from death; she had lain near him, and touched his hair, and known that he, scarce over forty, was going, going

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at this instant for ever, as she held his hand; and she, too, had been all but carried after him. He had looked at her, and smiled, and moved a finger against the palm of her hand with a feeble softness that was the ghoulisish replica of the movements of their new-born babe. He had told her with his eyes that her remorse for her failings was needless; that he loved her; that death could not be beaten; and that there was nothing left to do but tell each other that they loved, had always, would always, and then for him to go.

"But don't cry, Myra, wife of my heart! I love you, my darling, and you will have our last boy. My sweet wife, bear God's will."

"Never!" she had thought. She would never bear God's will, never willingly, for this deed of hell. She had loved David—him alone, and no one, nothing else, no, not their children.

But the knowledge that by conquering these gorgon thoughts she was obeying *his* will, David's, had been some reward, and had given her a half-living, unbreakable contact with him that made it possible genuinely to smile into his face as his hand unfolded from its grip on hers, and was dead.

The old impetus to live as though he were still with her continued, while the new impetus of fending for his children was being created. To look upon them made her imagine she was still a wife, and at the same time remember she was a widow.

But that they should not be overcome, nor share her sense that earth was cracking, dazed her and seemed unnatural. Were they stone effigies, these

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creatures of her making? The pangs they had caused her body when she gave them life were not to be compared with those endured by her mind as it stared at her beloved's death. That his own children should survive him and not know it was a crime goaded her to a mad hatred of them, which to realise that they were helpless, pitiful, and her most precious care, only blasted into frenzy. She hated them, but should not; she knew it, yet hated more. Yes! they might need her, and the world lift unsympathetic eyebrows in genteel remonstrance; but she had lived in David, and he was destroyed. They should have gone first. Not Nature's way, but to Myra it would have seemed less unnatural. She was left with a brood of albatrosses round her neck, deserted, upon a dead and silent sea. She had loved one man with an intensity so concentrated that it had left her senses numb to the world's contents by themselves. Loving him was what she had meant by being alive. Half of her was dead, and four ghosts stayed to mock her. As ghosts they haunted her; as at ghosts she lunged at them; like ghosts they left her no spiritual peace.

The world decreed that to a widow her husband's children are her solace. But of this well-meant convention Myra's brain made a mad translation. If that were what the world said, then its sympathy was for the children; and if its sympathy lay with them, they sided with it. If they sided with it, their hands too were against her. Thus crime on crime was added to their guilt, and every circum-

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stance of pathos, which in the eyes of others made their plight more poignant, seemed to distracted Myra a provocation and an insult. She never forgave them their innocence, nor the pity they unconsciously evoked.

But for the most part she was able to disguise her feelings for the outside world. Secretly she burned to provoke a challenge—, while unchallenged, yet dreaded the consequences if she did. Hence the malignity she felt against society overflowed, since she dared not give it vent, upon her children; the resentment she harboured against her children, but was impelled by convention to restrain, was in part displaced on to society. Thus its good intentions produced in this unwilling fugitive of death—too insecurely-minded to accept society, too subtle-minded for it to understand—only a twofold hatred.

In later years Myra Greer came to love her children; or rather, the love which in her early bereavement had been flung aside as a thing of no importance, compared with blazoning her love for David, gradually became more dominant. But not even then was a balance established in her mind—only a conflict.

She was still cruel. For one thing, Myra was impelled to disguise from herself that she loved her children instinctively, tenderly, without other reason than because they were hers. To convince herself in these moods that she did not care a fig for any of them, she was continually saying so, with the result that they grew up, being told they were

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loathsome little brats one day, and more to their mother than everyone on earth the next.

Never far under the surface movements of her mind was the devotion to David which, whenever chance reminded her too vividly of her loss, galvanised her to a spasm of fresh savageries against her children, but at other times took on more rationally expressed forms of affection and companionship.

If to hate and love are close to one another, to hurt and love are closer. Myra was consumed by the feeling that she must fight. It was only thus that her love found an outlet. And fight she did—relatives and servants, strangers and tradesmen; brothers, sisters, mother, children. She must follow David's wishes; wishes expressed by a rich man, which he foresaw would be ripe for fulfilment when years later he would be richer still. But his wishes were his wishes, and his widow's impulse drove her to execute them blindly, indiscriminately, stupidly, passionately. To do so brought her nearer to him. Her darling husband, whom she had never been able to anger, though whom remorseless memory told her she must have sorely tried, her lovely dear, called to her still, was near her, and kept her alive as a lifebelt keeps one floating on the sea.

She felt an accumulated guilt which put her fearfully in mind of the dark and vengeful ways of her people's Jehovah, and which she could not dissociate from her sins towards her husband in his lifetime. Now that he was dead, she must be particularly on her best behaviour, and with ceaseless

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diligence carry out "his wishes." If this lieutenancy brought her against the world, even if it struck thus her husband's children, no matter. They must learn to be grateful with her for their opportunity to show that they could endure for His sake, and that it was a privilege to be His children and His wife, and love Him.

II

TO the little boy the morning of departure for the holidays was thrilling. He rushed to the nursery windows and, clambering upon a chair, leaned out to see if the 'bus was coming; and when it had arrived stayed there, still watching ecstatically the bare head and blue brassard of Monsieur Canaire as he shouldered the trunks out of the front door, and pushed and levered them up on to the 'bus roof into the outstretched arms of the driver.

Then Roland drew back his head into the room and informed his younger sister, Janet, with gobbling excitement, of what was beginning. His hands, so carefully washed an hour before, grew blacker and blacker, as they gripped the grimy stone sill with the rough level surface and the sour taste.

But only too soon some horrible adult, his unimaginative nurse, came bustling into the nursery, hauled him from his glorious crow's nest, shook him tidy, scolded him for his hands, and hustled him up the landing to a bare and tiny room without a view. Here he was disconsolately abandoned, threatened with being left there altogether if he did not evince complaisance in that respect upon which his custodians maintained such adamant stupidity. This threat frightened him at first; but the realisation that it would never be carried out finally increased his bargaining power, and secured him a compromise

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whereby, having been left longer than usual in his solitude, and already half convinced he was deserted, he was rescued, a little unnerved, but without having surrendered.

And then the blissful time which followed!

He stood in the road, behind the 'bus, swinging its door to and fro in order to examine the mechanism of the step, which folded up vertically and vanished as the door closed. And when he had sated his curiosity he must glut his sense of power, delighting in the circumstantial evidence of this which he derived from watching only the step while he moved the door, and perceiving that the speed of one varied absolutely with the other's.

Then more experiments, while, standing close against the step, he lifted one foot on, trying to mount, but, directly he shifted his weight off the ground, tipping backwards and sitting heavily down. This failure was followed by a more instructed effort, and he scrambled along the seat to the glass window at the end, from which he could see the horse's hindquarters and the coachman's frayed, turned-up trouser edges and his knobbly boots. The animal's hindquarters shivered inexplicably every now and then, its black tail whisked and swished across them, and half a dozen flies rose up and scattered, only to redescend.

To the other window soon came Janet, two years older than himself, and they reported to one another on whatever met their gaze, comparing notes on the contours and the spasms of the rump on which each had best view.

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Then their mother's voice was heard saying, "Get in, Alexia," to their elder sister; and Alexia and Dan, their mother and their nurse, all climbed in.

As the 'bus jolted deliciously on its way, Roland yielded himself slowly to the waxing sensation of reality in this uprooting of the family, from which again his mind shifted to the catch securing in its case the carriage clock that was his allotted care for the journey.

Just as an invalid, lying naked upon a couch, with his eyes closed, feels only the vaguely circumscribed areas of pressure from a doctor's thumbs, now on one part of his body, now on another, but not the movements in between, so Roland discovered that his mind was floating now round this bobbing cork, now that, making pleasant, gentle contacts, as the corks approached, bumped, and swam away.

Here and there among the neurotic regions of his mother's cruelties, like the interspersed races on a map of Hungary, were little tracts of liberated intuitions; and she used always to give Roland some miniature task on these journeys to keep him out of mischief or from getting lost, but equally to make him happy, through feeling that he too had his responsibilities, by fulfilling which he was helping the family and her. She could only understand him when she forgot her duties and loved him as a child. She delighted in his solemnity, and in his taking in as dead earnest the task of clutching one little parcel, as if he had been organising the distribution of the country's food supply.

As the 'bus turned the corner of the road Roland's

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mother settled down on the seat and looked round at the children, smiling at them with degrees of preoccupation which varied with their years. She smiled whole-heartedly at her youngest because he looked such a little darling, conveying by her smile and in her screwed-up eyes that for him, for that second, she would suspend all the business of the world. Then at Janet, but now her smile, "And you too, my duck, are you happy?" was followed by the cold inquiry, "And are you wearing the thicker stockings, as I said?" Then to Daniel and Alexia it glided; till with the last the love was hardly visible, and the mother's expression conveyed almost nothing but anxiety that her eldest child should be learning how to conduct those matters which would fall to her lot too, Mrs. Greer hoped, some day. And the glance which rested on the nurse was friendly and conspiratorial. "We shall manage them, nurse, I think, don't you? I am afraid you must be tired; we've had such a rush."

It was in the variability of this admixture that lay the unique relations between Roland and his mother. To the others her messages conveyed love and practicalities; to Roland love alone. Therein lay his kingdom.

If all went well, the holiday atmosphere was officially introduced as the 'bus started—officially, because the children had been ungovernably discounting it for three weeks before the due date. If all went well, too, was important, for all depended on their mother, and she depended on her neuralgia, the

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tradesmen, and the smooth working of her plans. True, the clouds gathered more usually towards the end of a holiday and during the return rather than at the outset. In any case, while the earth remained undisturbed by tremors, Roland remained absorbed by the experience of change, although one might be distracted by false alarms, which sometimes even were not unpleasant.

The party was almost half-way to the station when Mrs. Greer suddenly ejaculated, not hysterically but in a preoccupied undertone, "Do you know, I believe I've forgotten my keys?" She peered into her little bag, holding it with one hand while she fumbled with the other. The children, though used to this ceremony, which they had all seen practised in season and out, paused in their talk to one another, turned their heads towards their mother's lap, and offered comments, caustic from the elder ones, ribald from the younger.

Each knew that the scene must go further before it could stop. Their mother continued fumbling, but raised her eyes slowly from the bag and focused them horizontally, first at infinity, then on each of the children in turn. Her lids parted more widely as her consternation grew. From hearing none of the conversation she became irritably aware of all, when, as her optimism ceded to the pessimism which had been perceptible in the background and which she had, as it were, been holding in leash, not really believing it would be needed, she grew once again oblivious to everything except a general noisiness. When she felt that this had become

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indecorously frivolous, that the keys could not be there, or that the situation demanded histrionically drastic treatment to prevent its degenerating into farce, she galvanised the bag into a somersault upon her knees, her mouth gaped and she snapped, "No, stop it, children! Nurse, I believe I *have* left them behind!"

Here began the second phase, when the gravity increased and levity must be suppressed on pain of provoking, in earnest, scenes which were in any case only too likely to arrive in due course. Mrs. Greer addressed her second remark to the nurse as to the only person alive to the situation and capable of behaving as such. The nurse, who had as good an idea as the children of the outcome, but who, unlike them, received not pocket money but a wage, acted according to what she knew her mistress stood in need of, and, leaning forward with polite concern, asked if madam thought she had left the keys on the hall table, or in the dining-room. With concern but not frenzy; for she realised half consciously that she must not show more anxiety than Mrs. Greer in what was peculiarly Mrs. Greer's scene.

In due course, having recaptured her audience, but, as she knew, only for a second, and with a trick that, as she likewise knew, could not be used a second time, the mother of this family shook her bag empty on to her lap, when out, last of everything, tumbled with a shameless jingle the missing keys.

"Oh! There they are!" she exclaimed with a miniature gesture of relief. "Thank heavens!"

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She looked round with an air implying that, now she had found the keys, she did not mind saying how much she had feared that she would not. The children exclaimed with relief which, though outwardly at the keys' recovery, was really at their own escape from the storm which had been threatening—their mother's fury. The nurse, who again had been addressed as if she alone had adequate appreciation, swayed backwards and forwards, rippling her body and her face with flattering congratulation. It might have been supposed that she, and indeed the mother too, were glad of the accident and thought its risks worth while, so much did they enjoy their feelings of relief and the opportunity for fatuous chatter that ensued.

"I felt sure they must be somewhere, mam," the nurse purred, and only Janet and Roland were young and foolish enough to be amused by this philosophical audacity. To them, with no responsibilities, the manifest absurdity of their nurse's intellectual caution was one of the most real parts of the incident.

As long as major matters went well, the happiness of her children reacted on Mrs. Greer's, and hers in its turn upon her children's. But a puff of wind, and their influence was lifted away, and was as nought. Some of the incidents, for example, which annoyed their mother, entranced them. If his mother could have transported her family to the sea by pressing a button, she would have done so with delight; Roland, never.

When the 'bus reached the old Hyde Park Corner and was held up by a block the wrong side of Bird

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Cage Walk, his mother began to tut and fret and lose her temper. Roland wanted to climb on to the roof and gaze as upon a kingdom over the sluggish rivers damming themselves up in every direction. It was a fugitive privilege to be able to stare at the inhabitants of a four-wheeler only a foot away, who had come from he knew not where and were going he knew not whither; who might be ignorant of, indifferent to, his existence, but who, willy-nilly, were being compelled to exhibit themselves and a piece of their lives to him for a definite period of time.

To his mother, unimaginative dullard, these quasi-neighbours were apparently of no interest. For two pins she would have got out of the 'bus, kicked her way to the front of the queue, and boxed the policeman's ears. With her permission Roland would have wriggled under all the cab-horses in London to beseech him to hold up his blue arm for ever, just to see how many four-wheelers there were in the world.

"Roland, don't be silly," his mother would have snapped, as much as to say she could not be bothered with childish phantasies and fun, however charming, when she was concerning herself with the really important things. She would have laughed and been amazed had Roland retorted that his suggestions *were* important things.

Then the traffic began to move, but the Greers' 'bus still crawled slowly, and their mother's testy impatience drew near its culmination.

"Tsa! Look! Everything else is getting in

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front of us!" she complained, as some accursedly inopportune motor-car slid ahead of them.

The children tried almost to will the rival's wheels to revolve backwards, or, even with its blue clouds of petrol lolling derisively up against their windows, to pretend that they saw no such thing. But they were not to win so flimsy a case as that, and Mrs. Greer ordered Daniel to put his head outside and give the driver a piece of his—she meant her—mind. Her testiness, which was provoked by the coachman, filtered into her request to Daniel. She did not much mind this, provided it was felt—by the more the better—that she would raise a stinging dust if she did not have her way. And again, when the unhappy Dan had come through the altercation, and paraphrased as best he could the Cockney repartee of the irrepressible driver, leaving enough substance in his own version to account for his incomplete success, but bowdlerising it enough to keep his mother from taking up the matter herself, even then Mrs. Greer deposited on the pitiful young go-between, as though *he* were the wretched coachman, the brunt of her ill-favour.

Daniel had a hard time. He was the eldest boy, and was irresistibly impelled by his mother's widowhood and his cruelly exploited ambition to fill a father's place, and to assume responsibilities from which he should have been exempt for many years. As a child, he did not want yet to engage in fights with abusive cab-drivers; as a paterfamilias and a man he was willing to tackle anybody over any-

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thing. Once he had done so, it was impossible to return to his mother and report failure. Her terrible sneers, his prematurely forced will, precluded it. So the child, who had put on a tin sword, was sent out to fight real fights, and expected to return only with victory.

But even if they were caught at Hyde Park Corner, they were sure of a straight run down Constitution Hill, and Bird Cage Walk, with the moving blocks of brass, scarlet, and cream-crested soldiers dotted about the sandy wilderness on the right, and with the unvisited greens, where only common children played, on the left. Here for once the pleasures of children and the purposes of grown-ups were not opposed. Sometimes, even, Roland's mother would point out to him the drilling ranks, knowing he would like to see the live originals of the miniatures he had at home. And so he did.

Power here was real. The soldiers did move—without your touching them. On his drugget floor he had to pretend they did, and, when he had pushed or lifted them round, pretend he had not pretended. Clearly, how attractive grown-up life was.

At certain points on their route—the same each holiday—Roland's mother invariably declared her conviction that the driver was malicious, or an imbecile, or both, and anxiously compared the time on her unreliable gold wrist-watch—poking aside the broad leather rim which nearly covered it—with that on the nurse's—a sham silver half-hunter, bearing figures in rich blue—which she kept

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squeezed inside the stiff-ribbed waistbelt of her white skirt.

"Where on earth does the man think he's taking us?" said Mrs. Greer as she turned her head round and rested her chin on her shoulder, looking out of first one window and then another. "Why, he's going down Grosvenor Place, the idiot, and all round by Buckingham Gate. He ought to have cut across Constitution Hill. Daniel, knock on the window and ask him what he's doing."

So out went Danny's head once more for another altercation.

Their mother's knowledge of the way seemed to Roland a divine gift. How did she know? Why was it obvious where the driver should have gone? And when Roland asked, she turned to him and said, as though addressing someone who had been a man-about-town since the 'nineties, "Why, of course! Don't you see? That way will take him out too far west, and then he'll have to come all the way east again to get over the river. It would have been about as sensible as making a loop on the other side of Bird Cage Walk and going all the way up the Mall and down by the Park. They are both halves of a circle, don't you see?"

And she described these figures in the air with her black-gloved hand, apparently under the impression that Roland's ignorance of Euclid rather than of London was at the root of his confusion.

But Roland just blinked and grew more confused than ever. He wanted to say "Stop! Stop! Don't go so fast! What's all this about Grosvenor

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Place? What is the Mall, and why is that sometimes Maul, and sometimes Mal, and yet also Pell Mell?"

When his mother talked about the streets of London in her easy way, he wanted to laugh and kiss her and say, "You are funny when you talk like that! What is it really all about?" Yet *she* thought *him* funny for not understanding what was plain and simple.

But Roland's incipient, unhappy bewilderment was swept away as they turned off the Waterloo Road and the horse began to gather speed in order to help itself to the crest of the steep tunnel which ended inside the station. They approached the bend in the tunnel, the daylight disappeared, and there remained only an anæmic, greenish gas-jet in an unwashed glass case projecting from the wall.

As the horse struggled hazardously up the last few yards, missing its foothold every now and then, its hoofs slipped backwards over the cobbles, making a noise like ascending arpeggios on hollow coconut-shells. An atmosphere of real danger filled the 'bus while the arpeggios rippled echoingly. Roland, and perhaps the others too, already saw the horse falling forwards on its knees, entangled in the harness and making ungainly, frantic efforts to recover its feet. But all was well; the tension eased; and fresh sights and smells captured Roland's senses.

III

A PORTER, wearing no coat and a scarlet tie, opened the door; and the family split up into two or three parties, each with duties hastily prescribed by Mrs. Greer.

Roland's was to sit on the hill of luggage till nurse fetched him and Janet to the carriage. He was quite content to do this, although, when he saw the various scouting parties go off, he did not feel absolutely confident they would return. Largely, perhaps, this was on account of his feeling that they could not. How, in this enormous, noisy, iron and echoing world, could they possibly find their way to a spot which they had never seen before, and which resembled indistinguishably a hundred others? Who could reasonably be expected to keep his mind on a single purpose with the plopping of musically slamming carriage doors to listen to, a thousand porters to watch juggling with piles of luggage, trucks on tiny wheels that swivelled independently in a fascinating way, labels being pasted on with a huge flat dripping brush, and walls of sloping pigeon-holes revealing hundreds of differently tinted tickets, and clicking mysteriously as they emitted them?

But surprisingly soon nurse returned with a porter, and Janet and Roland were taken to the carriage. Immediately he saw it Roland felt that

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he possessed this carriage. On the other hand, immediately the guard saw him the guard apparently felt that he possessed Roland. The benign and beaming man looked at him as if *here* were the parcel he had lost and had been looking for so long.

"Now then, Tommy, in you get!" he said; on which Roland wondered, even though he knew that the use of this name was humour and that the guard probably did not really suppose Tommy was his name, whether he ought. He would have found it difficult to account for this doubt. In the first place, the guard was cheating. Adults did not accost one another by name if they were unacquainted; yet they appeared to imagine, so Roland had observed, that they possessed an unquestioned prerogative to perpetrate this solecism when addressing children, supposing, perhaps, that children did not notice the difference. The fatuous conceit of age prevented these overgrown owls from recognising that the breach was more serious in this case, not less.

In the second place, Roland's own name—far more than others'—seemed so concrete a thing, so indistinguishable mentally from the object to which it must refer, that, if you uttered another name, it was clearly impossible you should be meaning him, and, if you meant him, clearly there was only one name which could in nature denote him, and that name and he were the same thing.

True, even if the guard had called him by his right name, Roland would have been mystified by

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such clairvoyance. But he could swallow mystification. What he could not countenance was the dissolution of his ego. And to call him by what was not his name amounted to trying to cast a spell over him and turn him into another being. He must have explicit, irrevocable recognition, before anything else could proceed, of the equation, *He—was—Roland, Roland—was—he*. Otherwise—and didn't they all see?—the world must cease to exist.

Hence he stood hesitatingly between the guard and the door, uncertain whether he should tacitly countenance this outrage, or undertake the prodigious task of expounding to the guard its philosophical implications. However, the guard seemed to believe in the liquidation of sin by committing it first and offering a handsome price for a dispensation afterwards. For, while Roland still stood hesitating, with a solemn smile, by which he meant "I say, but you're breaking all the rules, you know! Aren't you being very wicked, though you are such a nice guard? (And may I touch your green flag?—it's all rough)," the guard added with debonair blasphemy, "Come along, Jimmy, hurry up, or I shall have to lock you out instead of in!"

Stooping suddenly, he pushed his hands through under Roland's armpits, pressed his fingers against the breast buttons of Roland's covert coat, and lifted him off the platform into the carriage. The enormity of this procedure was immediately lost sight of, and Roland's philosophical severity melted, by the distraction of his attention to the stiff pile

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of the red seat coverings and by the lure of the little wooden roller over which the window strap was slid.

With the platform's smooth glide backwards past the panes—first slow, silent, steady, soon swooping to a rapid rumble and a rhythmic roar—a repetition was enacted at a less hectic level of the little scene of remembering forgotten duties which had first occurred in the omnibus. Then, with the compartment to themselves, the members of the family were allotted their places and their recreations. Alexia and Daniel took out books, being made all too soon to sacrifice their corners. Janet was allowed a picture book, but had to face the engine, otherwise she would be sick; Roland had *Comic Cuts* and Peter Rabbit, but his chief occupation was to look out of the window.

Very soon the ephemerality of this rare pleasure was decried by his mother or his nurse, and he began to hate them for what was in fact a true prophecy, but what, when inevitably fulfilled, seemed like the cause. He dreaded the fulfilment especially because of what would follow.

"Now, darling," said his mother, "come and rest. Lie down and put your head on my lap."

Mrs. Greer wore a black serge skirt; the serge was rough and tickled Roland's face and the pillow which her lap formed, while it might be the comfortablest that could be improvised (though even that Roland doubted), was not comfortable even so. He wanted to refuse, for all sorts of subtleties were

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involved. He did not want to "rest" at all. To "rest" while awake seemed meaningless, and to sleep, he knew, would not be possible.

And the serge lap was horrid. But he dared not say so, because he knew his mother would interpret it as a sign of, if not hate, at least "dislove," and in this she would have been right, as Roland was confusedly aware.

If he must go through with the resting business, he preferred his nurse's lap—cool and smooth. Besides, she never conveyed with any of his mother's dreadful force that she was enduring agonies of neuralgia or discomfort for his sake.

But, since Roland could not give his real reasons, he relied on false ones. These, naturally, his mother was easily able to vanquish, and to Roland's endurance for the thousandth time of the ignominy of logical defeat was added the smart of knowing he had better weapons which yet must not be used. The first tears began to sting his eyelids and this peevishness confirmed his mother that "rest" was undoubtedly required.

"Come along now, Roland, do what I tell you, do you hear?" she sang in a slightly raised tone, clipping the words to give them a disciplinary flavour. Then she added in a maternal voice with a suspicion of cajolery, "There! Is that nice, darling? Use mummy's lap as a pillow, to get as comfy as you like."

Her face came close over his, and Roland, caught like a fly beneath a tumbler, shut his eyes quickly and pretended to want sleep, rather than face his

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mother's eyes so near and let them see what was in his own.

It was horrible to have enemies and to feel hostile, but it burned like a brand to have to conceal that you hated them. The fools! The beasts! Was it not natural to want to cry and to feel sulky?

What mutilated his spirit was not reproof for his actions—getting his hands dirty, or hitting Janet on the head with a doll—but reproof for having experienced a feeling. To tell him he was delinquent and unlovable because he had been scorched by the fierce heat of jealousy or hate, seemed so cynical an outrage of justice that the mere fact that adults could do it left him excruciated and bewildered, and paralysed him in a powerlessness for which blind and speechless weeping was the only drug. These adults could smile and smile, not knowing they were villains.

But the train began to fill up. In a few seconds a stubborn passenger dashed the children's fond hopes of a peaceful journey. His potential generosity, which already had been weakening before his fear of being crowded out, was utterly extinguished by Mrs. Greer's offensive bluff and blustering, and, happening to choose the side on which she sat, he had literally to dig himself in.

For Myra defeat symbolised frustration of her dead husband's—David's—wishes. Because that was intolerable she fought tooth and nail whenever she fought at all, and neglected no device by which failure might be staved off. When that could not be done she continued pretending that it could, and

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passed on the knock to all within reach who were weaker than herself.

In this case the children had to "rest" and "stretch out." Though the carriage was full, she fiercely insisted that Roland should remain with his head on her lap, so that the child had to lie fantastically contorted, willy-nilly poking the stranger in the flank. Roland dreaded lest the new-comer might take him on this account for a partisan in the dispute, instead of recognising that he was only a pawn, though to be even a pawn was bad enough.

Terrible, however, though Mrs. Greer could be, she was not consistently a fiend. Little by little, Roland slid into a sitting position and, when his mother's turmoil had had time to subside, she reconciled this last token of defeat with her refusal to recognise it, by asking with disingenuous airiness, "Are you rested enough now, Roley dear? Would you like to sit up and look out of the window again?"

Thus, the crowded carriage meant a scene before the journey was over, but preserved Roland, if not the others, from the affliction of a "rest."

His emotional thrill on arriving in an unknown place was more intense than could have been any intellectual delight of an adult. Joy flowed from the novelty as such, and, more, from the realisation, provoked by this, that there was an illimitable extent of mental and sensual discovery still awaiting one. But pain came when unpractical and ill-timed dreaminess was brought to a jolting end by the requirements of his nurse and mother. These mentors repeatedly thought the children were joking

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when they were in deadly earnest. "Don't be silly!" was the frivolous refrain. In their thoughtless and illogical conceit these adults believed that children never thought and never acted seriously at all.

Once again, even on a country station platform, while Janet and Roland were finding everything deserving of inspection, the adults were tutting and fussing. Only when the whole family had settled in the cab did silent expectancy fill the air—the children's, pleasurable, and concerned with their new rooms; their elders', a carking fear lest the milk had not been boiled, or lest the mutton were Canterbury instead of Scotch.

The storm which was as likely to break as to blow over as soon as they had taken possession of the lodgings seemed always both inexplicable and natural to the children. There never seemed to them adequate cause, yet apparently there always was. Indeed, one of the many temperamental rifts between them and their mother was that, while she could never resist a scene if she could possibly provoke one, her children were willing to submit to any indignity or ignore the most provocative impertinence for the sake of peace and quiet. Their mother's terrible propensity for battle had bred this pacifism in them.

And more. Each side unconsciously reacted on the other. The more stormy and neurotic grew their mother, the more ingratiating and amiable grew they. Hostility, if not hatred and contempt, crept softly into their mutual attitudes, and, before either

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camp had fully realised what had come over it, both were spoiling for a fight. Wits of a sudden became astonishingly sharp. Rashly uttered half-truths were fiendishly seized upon and promptly twisted into lies; these falsities were flung savagely back in the faces of their forgers, and in a few minutes, whilst heated challenges were flung wildly and idiotically down, family affection had been utterly driven out by the impact of unbridled passions horrible to see. In such an atmosphere of ruthless war the holidays began.

IV

LIFE at such times was like an obstacle race in which there was no prize—one of those “compulsory-voluntary” items on a programme chosen for one by the authorities, with which the curricula of our public schools abound.

This particular event placed Roland in a position rather like that where a mild and harmless citizen finds himself by misfortune in the same railway carriage, or at the same table, as a disputatious pair in their cups. As the tide of temper rises the timid little spectator makes unobtrusive efforts to change compartments, or move to another table; but this very act, indicative merely of an anxious neutrality, provokes the quarrelling drunkard to take notice. He possesses generally at this stage of his intoxication a degree of self-knowledge and a perspicuous cunning that are never his when he is sober. A subtle, if potatory, logic tells him that this rabbit is running away because it finds him objectionable though dares not say so, and, challenging the creature with contemptuous delight, he compels it either to stay on and endure its torment, or give him a pretext, under the guise of insulted innocence, for venting his beastly spleen upon a scapegoat.

By the time that the battle was in full swing Roland was yearning to slip unobtrusively from the danger zone. But the very second that he pushed

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back his chair to get up and leave the room, his mother pounced upon him and asked him where he was going, in a voice which by itself told him with deadly clearness of his tactical mistake, and that he could give no answer which would satisfy.

Sometimes Mrs. Greer would not even trouble with this perfunctory prologue. Not worrying to conceal what her mental process had been—that Roland's movement was a reminder to her of the proximity of another target for her batteries—she would flash her fighting glance upon him, annihilate his defence unheard with the screeching savagery of a madwoman, and hurl at his child's head accusations and threats as inappropriate as they were horrible. She charged first at one helpless bystander, then at another; she was like an enraged elephant which realises that no one dares defy it.

"Who has been setting you against me? Answer me! Do you hear? Do you want me to give you a good thrashing? That's what your father would have done if he'd been here. Do you know that, you little brat? Do you know you killed your father? Yes, *you!* It was you who were responsible for your father's death! I hate you, all you children! Do you think I wouldn't rather the lot of you had died instead? What do I care for any of you? Don't snivel, Alexia! And listen to me, Daniel!"

And now, aware she was approaching her only formidable opponent, if not her equal, she screamed and yelled hysterically, beside herself.

"Since none of you children think I have any

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say in things, and since you're all against me, and you influence the others against me, Daniel, I shall leave you all! You and Alexia shall be sent to reformatories—to reformatories, do you hear? Janet and Roland shall go and live with grandmother. None of you will ever see me again! I shall sell everything and let the house, and shake the dust of England off my feet for ever!”

She spoke these words as if she would eat grandmother and fix the price with her prospective tenant at the sword's point.

“And a jolly good job too!” Daniel bit the words with an earnestness which would have been comical if they had not been so terrible, uttered seriously by a child against its mother.

“Ah! So you think so, do you?” snarled Mrs. Greer, pouncing. “So it's *you* who've been setting the others against me!”

“He *hasn't* been setting us against you,” La intervened, as much as to say peevishly, “Tsa! When *will* you give up this idiotic illusion of some bogey ‘setting us against’ you!”

“No, he hasn't been setting us against you,” echoed Janet, taking courage from the first two.

“He hasn't been setting us against you,” piped Roland, borrowing the swagger, in his turn.

“Oh! Hasn't he? Then who has, I should like to know?” pounced his obsessed mother yet again.

“Answer me! ANSWER ME!” she hurled, and dashed, or rather scuttled like a crab, at Roland,

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with one hand stretched out to seize him by the shoulder and a clenched fist raised to hit him.

"Ah, you shan't go for him!"

Daniel, revolted, made an ungainly movement and put himself between his small brother and his mother.

A boy of fourteen and a woman of forty, the one white with dismay, the other red with rage, stood facing one another scarcely a few inches apart. Again the comedic was apparent, had anyone been present to observe it. But to all those who were, the scene was of life and death.

It seemed as though this last defiance would drive Myra Greer out of her senses, and she made as though to fling Daniel out of her way. With an expression of utter horror, such as he might have worn if forcing himself to touch a mutilated corpse, Daniel put his weight forward on his toes, and seized his mother's wrists. As she struggled, he pushed his elbows outwards and forced them up, thus twisting her wrists round and holding them down.

A spasm of incredulity at the insanity of a mortal who could dare touch the person of a God passed over his mother's face, to be chased immediately away by black rage.

"Ah, you devil, no, you don't," he muttered, shuddering with disgust, while he held her firm as she tried to twist out of his grip.

"How dare you! Leave me alone this instant, Daniel!" she shouted.

"Not unless you promise to leave him alone." Daniel stood his ground.

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Wincing at the ignominy, Mrs. Greer bit her lip, wrenched one wrist violently free and struck Daniel on the side of his head as hard as she could.

"Mother! What are you doing?" Alexia, like a featherweight amateur jumping round a heavy-weight champion, danced nervously about the two antagonists. She did not dare take part as long as Daniel held their mother, but could not resist going to his help when he began to give way, and she rushed over to support him as he staggered, flushed, and struggled with his tears. Should he return to the attack or would the tears burst their dams first? Could he with dignity hit his mother in hot blood?

But she gave it no time to cool, for babbling with fury she turned on him again. Alexia, deriving strength from memories of Grace Darling and Joan of Arc, flung herself between.

"Will you get out of my way, you little beast?" her mother shouted in her face. "Do you think it right for Daniel to use violence on me—a woman, and his mother? You shall suffer for this, let me tell you. You shall suffer for this! I never forget," she added, raking her whole audience with a sweeping, flashing gaze, "and I never forgive! Never! *Never*, do you hear?"

"Oh, yes!" Alexia muttered, peevish again, now that the well-worn properties were being brought for the hundredth time upon the stage. The ill-concealed contempt stung her mother again, and with an "I'll teach you to talk to your mother like

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that!" she seized Alexia by the hair and flung her down.

The suddenness of this attack, its coarse brutality, overwhelmed Alexia; she began to sob, lying inert where she had fallen.

"Get up, you little fool," her mother commanded, as though no more obvious shamming could have been contrived. "Get up, this instant!" and she kicked and pulled her daughter to her feet, eager to dispel the shameful vision.

It was no wonder, however, if her children failed now to distinguish an attack from a retreat, and Janet, who had been trembling a yard away from her sister, suddenly jumped forward, and screaming like an animal kicked away her mother's hand as it was pulling at Alexia.

Pandemonium came one step nearer as Mrs. Greer uttered an hysterical cry, let go of Alexia, and hurled herself bodily, with her full force, upon her daughter of ten years.

The two crashed to the floor, a chair fell over near them, and a bowl of egg-shell china shattered into atoms. The flowers that had been in it lay crushed stupidly between its pieces and a trampled velvet table cloth; the two forms struggled like enraged imbeciles, and the cool water from the broken bowl trickled and spread according to the laws of Nature, undisturbed, towards its level through the velvet valleys.

Suddenly, from the corner where Daniel was standing, still with a protecting arm round Roland's shoulders, a falsetto ripple, like the quick quavering

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of an organ pipe, pierced the general confusion. It turned almost at once into the hoarse, protracted, raucous noise—half grunt, half groan—of a human vomit.

Roley, till now petrified on the spot where his pregnant protest had been made, had fallen without warning forward on his knees.

Sagging on his arms, dribbling, helpless, white as death, he shuddered and sobbed, quivered, shook his head, and choked as he tried to take in breath and relax from the spasm which contorted him.

In a flash his mother was on her feet, had disentangled herself from Janet, and, with accustomed hands, even at this moment beautiful, was holding Roland's head, wiping his face, settling him in a more comfortable position.

"Tsa! Oh, dear, all over the carpet!" she exclaimed. "Oh, *Roland!* Ach!" and she roughly wiped his mouth.

The violence with which she had kicked free from Janet, the swiftness of her movement towards him were mistaken. The anger in her voice, the disgust in her eyes, the absolutely baffling mixture of hatred and maternal care were too much for Roland.

He saw a red face suddenly loom large over his, the forehead shining with sweat, a tail of dark hair, which had begun to fall down in Mrs. Greer's struggles, hanging over her shoulder. Her breath came in short, quick, hot gasps upon his face; he seemed still to hear her oaths and see her strangling gestures against Janet, while she tended him with the movements of a nurse in a prison hospital.

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With a hoarse, feeble squeak he banged his mother's arms to one side and scrambled like a terrified calf on to his feet.

"No! I won't!" he blubbered, making for a sofa and putting it between him and her.

"Roland, don't be silly!" she snorted. "I'm not going to hurt you! Come here and let me wipe your face. You're a disgusting sight. You must lie down at once, or I shall have you on my hands all the holidays."

"No, no, I won't!" he blubbered more indistinctly, more positively than before.

"Do what I tell you, do you hear?" his mother shouted, stamping her foot, pressing her forehead wearily with one hand.

"It's all right, Roley," said Alexia, "let me help you."

"Sh-she's not to touch me, n-not to t-t-touch me!" sobbed Roland, shivering hysterically.

"All right, all right," repeated La, challenging her mother courageously with a glance and going over to her brother.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!" he sobbed interminably. "Sh - she sh -sh - sh - sh - sha - an't t-t-tou——"

"There, there, darling." Alexia patted him.

"Bah!" flung Mrs. Greer with theatrical indifference. "You children seem to think you are to be pitied. Do you think *I* enjoy the holidays?"

"I should like never to see any of you again! You attack me, you scheme against me, you set one another against me! How I've put up with

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this life so long I don't know. Slave, slave, slave! Year in, year out, day after day, day after day, morning, noon, and night! And this is what I get! You are hateful and wicked, that's what you all are!

"But I'll teach you! I'll get even with you all!" she suddenly shouted, flashing round at them, about to spring.

A release of the quivering organ stop, as Roland's wavering wail rose at once in answer to her movement, checked her; then the reproaches, the mad accusations, the theatrical, violent gestures, the shrieking threats began again. Pandemonium reigned supreme.

Throughout the whole crazy performance Roland was not only bewildered but frozen with terror by the complete absence of motive, by the mercurial change of moods.

What did his mother want? What could they do? What had they done wrong? What was behind it all? Why were they wicked? Why, why, why?

His mind was stretched, it seemed, till it must snap, his emotions plucked and ravaged till he felt disembowelled. He must find a refuge; he would go mad! Look! She was going to start again!

His mother crouched and moved like a mad-woman; her features worked like a stage villain's. But it was not a stage. It was real.

Yet sooner or later fatigue wore down poor Mrs. Greer. Under one pretext or another the children

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were allowed to escape to bed, it being implied that only something which her family felt vaguely resembled a Night Employment of Young Persons (Restriction of Hours) Act induced her to permit it, and that the Last Judgment was not over, but merely adjourned.

Alexia, old enough to remember other scenes like these, which had been at least survived, knew that, luckily or unluckily, the sun would rise tomorrow. Danny, generating at a high tension, from which he was never to escape, a rebel's resolutions to do or die, and to visit this she-fiend with abandonment by all four of them, showed lips pressed together into a frozen ripple, and let his mother see his thoughts just so far as she chose to look.

Janet and Roland, ten and eight years old, retching with impassioned tears, child-frantic at the frightful prospect of being marooned, even though the alternative was to be tended by a tigress, stumbled upstairs to find oblivion in the night.

And their mother? Would that she might have done the same!

A widow, at moments it seemed a maniac, she sat on alone, imprisoned, like a witch tied up with a wild cat inside a sack, with her crazy thoughts, and submerged under a torrent of dark impulses which would not be denied.

"Oh, David! David! What is wrong? You are not here to guide me! I try to do what you wished; you know I do! Yet the children are

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wicked, and they hate me. Myer sets them against me. You always said. . .”

And her tenderness for her dead love was throttled horribly by her rising passion, her swelling hate for her mother and her brother. Hate and love contorted her spirit and her body, and she flushed, even alone, with the anguish of realising how damaging and destructive of the approval and sympathy of human beings was the outrush of her unharnessed feelings. The limit to her spirit's frenzy came only when the relief brought by its physical expression proved deficient, and she became conscious of how strained, contorted, and conventionally ridiculous, her body's movements were. Then she relaxed for shame, overcome by her unhappiness and the knowledge that she was inadequate, that, though her burdens were crushing her to misery, maybe insanity, but not death, she must carry them, condemned and alone, and suffer without remission till the anæsthesia of old age numbed all.

She cried feebly, her shoulders jerking up and down in sobbing spasms, the black serge of her dress creating a tiny, soft, dry rustle as it rubbed against the red plush covering of the awful lodging-house armchair.

How she loved David! Really she loved the children! But she hated them! Yes! No! Yes! She knew not which she did. Only she wished that she could die. As she approached the extreme of each emotion in turn she was tripped by her knowledge that it contained a histrionic, attitudinising element of self-pity, of sentimentality. Yet not

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even this could stop her. It was an addition to her genuine suffering, as inevitable and as uncontrollable as her very grief.

Exhausted by the tornado scene and its aftermath, Myra Greer left her chair, and slowly compromised with reality by performing routine actions, such as putting the furniture in its place and turning out the lights. In her left hand was her handkerchief, wet; in her right a handbag and a novel; and, sniffing through her tear-choked nostrils, she went slowly up to bed. She knew perhaps that as she did so she cut a pathetic figure; yet, for all her self-knowledge, she *was* a pathetic figure. And that, too, she knew.

Shame again, chased by rage, chased by pain, chased by loneliness and longing, surged through this solitary, wrecked woman as she moved through time, fulfilling the implacable doom determined for her by the past, and determining implacably the destinies of her children for the future.

After her childhood the character of Myra Greer at forty was not to be escaped. Her own mother, deserted at eight by a drunken, brutal father, orphaned at ten, a mother before she was twenty, and a widow at thirty, had herself been the product of misfortune. Myra's children, spiritually deformed already by the insane antics of their frenzied mother, would grow up incapable of coping with the external, or their own internal worlds. They would have children, and visit on them the effects of their own souls' mutilations. When, how, could this ghastly sequence end? It seemed never, until the accumu-

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lated deformities of generations produced a last generation unable to conduct normal life or marriage, which would die bachelors, spinsters, demented and barren.

Misfortune was fruitful; and, whatever the mysterious forces of heredity, environment at any rate would reproduce itself again and again, engendered unwittingly and handed on by one sinewless generation to the next. Grandmothers would live to lament the discord between their children and their grandchildren, their own memories of their own hated parents unheeded and forgotten. The grandchildren would cast off with cold determination the hateful tyrants that their parents were, only to become, after their dreams of a new enlightenment had vanished, as hateful in their turn to their own young. Spiritual deformity would breed spiritual deformity, cruelty would beget cruelty, and inward torment an atmosphere that would be a hotbed for them both.

Myra, alone, stepping tired up to her bedroom, saw this vista back into the past, herself as the final object of pity. Danny, her crusader son, awake in darkness in a room above her head, would see it soon stretched into the future. Did Myra know that he would see it? Did she know that all her children would? Would they? Was it true? Could she not change both herself and their future? Yes! No! Yes! If only she could curb those wild horses within her and carry out her David's wishes! Ah! But that was what always provoked these miseries.

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Then, like a moving picture projected for the twentieth time upon a screen illumined by an ever-dimming light, till only the more emphatic and familiar features can be recognised, though those alone are enough now to tell the story, the same thought-cycle revolved in Myra's mind, till even this wrecked creature was carried off by sleep.

V

THESE "rows" had the quasi-reality, the fantastic frightfulness of nightmares. Like dreams they could seem more real than reality, like reality they offered less escape than dreams. They offered no escape, no escape at all. It was the rack.

At a period when their lives should have been developing upon secure foundations, and their spiritual roots left in undisturbed repose, these children, stunted and forced into precocious pygmies, were emotionally blown into the air at unaccountable intervals by an explosive hurricane.

Alexia and Daniel were old enough to understand that their mother had been in a temper, a very bad temper indeed, and to be thankful next day that it was over; Janet and Roland did not yet know of what stuff human beings were made. They woke up next morning quaking and stomach-sick at the prospect of the sentence which, outlined to them so luridly and so realistically the evening before, they had accepted in detail with that exquisite literalness of mind by which quite young children just beginning to explore the world so often put dull adults to shame.

Tiptoeing early down to breakfast, they met Alexia in the dining-room, and asked: "When are we going?" Alexia, puzzled a moment,

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realised what they meant just as she heard their mother's footsteps on the stairs. Hurriedly she whispered, "We aren't going, you little ninny! Sh! Don't say anything about last night, whatever you do! Just pretend it never happened. And don't let on we've been talking about it!"

Then, ardently finishing an imaginary sentence of spotless innocence as their mother entered, ". . . so, if you've got your spade and pail, I votes we start right away. Good morning, mother."

All this in a normal tone, intended to persuade Mrs. Greer that they had not been whispering secrets, but had been speaking as loud as that all the time; and Alexia hoped that her mother would explain the suddenly increasing loudness of their voices by her own approach, or if not, would realise at least that she was supposed to.

In silence, behind masks, between Alexia's last word and their mother's first appearance, or concurrently with the conventional chatter of the breakfast-table, Janet and Roland had to work it all out. "What? Do you mean that none of that is really going to happen after all? But She said, She *said* . . . But why did She say . . . ? Oh! Then it's all over? It's not going to happen after all?"

"But why did She say that we were going to be sent away if She didn't mean it? La, are you sure? Yes, you're right, I can see. Oh! what a mercy! Oh! Thank Goodness! Oo! Mummy! How lovely! Oh! I'm so glad!"

And, as they watched the cool exchange of con-

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versation between their mother and Alexia, each behaving, not absolutely as if nothing had happened, but rather with that extra degree of friendly suavity which hinted her promise to maintain the pretence that nothing had happened, the youngest children half-consciously discovered what was the contortion which this insatiable circus master was demanding of them: they might judge and talk about and wonder at their mother, but they must not let her know that she was judged, talked about, or wondered at. Nothing whatever in their manner must be allowed to wound her *amour-propre*. She must not be taxed with any past action, any word. She arrogated to herself the right to be contradictory, violent, and cruel, frightening her children into conspiring with her to deny implicitly and explicitly that she was all three.

But for all her unpredictable ways, Mrs. Greer, being only too sensitive to public opinion, especially the opinion of her own public, was always pulled up sooner or later in her irresponsible excursions; and everyone, after the first hesitation in waiting to make sure which way the wind was blowing, displayed only good-natured alacrity to take his or her share in begetting the lie that all was for the best in the best of all possible families, and rearing it with tender, extravagant, though somewhat stealthy, care to maturity. The children did their "bit" out of gratitude for their reprieve, their mother hers out of recognition for their tact. Thus Pelion was unplied from Ossa, till not even a still-born mouse could have been pointed to

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where those mountains trembled so little time before.

"Well, my dears, don't you think we can all be happy together these holidays?" Mrs. Greer began when breakfast was over, sitting back in an armchair with her head a little to one side, and fulfilling everybody's expectation that a pronouncement would be made.

The agenda which Mrs. Greer had really to transact were something like this: "Now, children, listen. You all know that last night I was in a violent temper, for which I ought to be thoroughly ashamed. Well, I am. But if I admit I was a disgrace, you must all do your shares in helping me to forget, and in keeping me in a good temper by making things easy for me. Because I really have rather a poor time, though you may not realise it; so play up, now, and show that you appreciate my taking the first step. It's not much to ask of you—just to ignore last night's scene."

But all this had to be conveyed in other words which, while hinting at the preceding night's events with the utmost delicacy, must appear to allude to something else, some sort of imaginary dummy, known and assented to by all.

"I'm sure," she continued, "it's not always easy to be good, or to make the best of things, but we must all try. We must all try and do what Daddy would have wanted, if he had been here." "Father" always became "Daddy" when a little pathos seemed appropriate.

"And then . . . well, you know what the Book

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of Proverbs says: 'A soft answer turneth away wrath, but . . .'"

"Ouw, yes," put in Alexia valiantly, pouting like an Assyrian bas-relief and looking down her nose. "Of course we shall enjoy the holls! It's our own silly faults if we lose our bates. It's jolly hard sometimes, *I* know, when Dan starts his nice ways, but I always try and remember what Solomon said, then. He was a wise old johnny in some things, anyhow."

And she laughed for a little, deliberately, as much as to say "There! I've not shirked *my* share in getting the family away from the edge of the precipice. Come on, you others! Take your cues!"

"All right, Trunky, I won't rag you this holls, I swear," Danny broke in. He was a lazy boy, and preferred to say as little as possible, paying the equivalent of his subscription instead by means of trailing an invaluable red herring across the family course. The allusion to the shape of his sister's nose would, he knew, shunt the whole conversation on to fresh lines and induce the desired atmosphere of good-fellowship at the same time.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Trunky, trunky, trunky!" laughed Janet and Roland, the little boy plucking at Alexia's sleeve as if to emphasise the jest, and pointing at her a derisive little arm.

"Oh, shut up, you little villain!" retorted Alexia, a little hurt, but aware of the value of this distraction in ensuring their safety from a greater danger.

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"Daniel! Roland!" Mrs. Greer intervened, pretending to be shocked. "How can you be so rude to your sister! It's not nice to say things like that! Not nice at all."

But she allowed them all to see, as Danny had calculated that she would, that she could not help being amused.

Then, as the play grew more noisy and more natural, "Now then, all of you, get down to the beach while it's fine. You must get as much fresh air as you can while we are away. I didn't bring you into the country just to stuff indoors. Cut along upstairs, Roland, and put on your things! Get along now!" And she made as though to spank him, half in earnest, half in jest, and so dispatched the whole family for the morning.

Roland pulled open the door and, laughing noisily with relief at the changed atmosphere, clattered clumsily upstairs; Janet ran nimbly in front of him, and whenever he caught up with her he grabbed her by the leg and pinched her all over till she screamed, and till his stubby little fingers could nip no more.

Danny followed, and soon had seduced his younger brother with tantalising, full-blooded school-boy schemes for shooting seagulls with an air-gun, playing rounders on the beach with a ball of solid rubber, or building a house with some real bricks which he had already discovered in the garden. In a moment Roland was absorbed in these plans, and Janet might pinch him back in vain, evoking merely a dignified reproach full of borrowed manliness.

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The succession by comic relief of the earlier scenes of Miltonic Pandemonium confounded in particular the younger children. They believed that their enemy, their ogress, their madwoman, their tyrant gaoler, was one person; she was two. They could not understand how one person could rave and coo, loathe and love, slash and play, threaten and forget, do and speak, as did their mother. Nor—and this they did not know—could she. But worse, their visible fear reminded her that she was fearful, their hesitant affection that she was fickle and unaccountable in hers. Their weakness told her of her misused strength, and their extravagant remorse that she herself could be remorseless. Their set looks and secretive ways dragged her mind before the fact that, if she pictured herself as protective and indulgent, they saw her as tyrannical and unjust.

In the last but one analysis it was for these reasons that the children were made to suffer, not because, as seemed in the first, they or the tradesmen had transgressed one of Mrs. Greer's laws. But in the last analysis, why should these reasons be sufficient cause? Other people could tolerate being faced occasionally with the truth about themselves; why could not Myra Greer? Was she—who delighted rhetorically to ask the same thing of her children—so different from everybody else?

In many ways she was. Her life had been different, and her mother's life before her. Her childhood, her marriage, her motherhood, her widowhood, all had contained some element of the

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extraordinary, as perhaps, too, had her inheritance from those masterful, oppressed, persistent, battered, victorious ancestors, who had "flourished" five hundred years before in Portugal and Spain, and who had drifted, scattered and dispossessed, across France to Italy and the Netherlands, and in later years to England.

When one contemplates the possible variety in human characters, in personal histories, in the secret action of heredity and the sorts and shades of environments which it is possible to choose and to produce; when one contemplates the infinity of ways in which these might be combined and might conflict, what wonder that individuals are different? How wonderful if any be the same!

When she flung out, "You aren't made differently from anybody else, are you?" it was their mother's voice, and not the content of her question, which conveyed to her children the only answer it would be safe to give. They knew, without examining the proposition, that whatever biology, physiology, psychology, and all the natural and moral sciences put together might have to say upon the matter, the answer was in the negative.

But the tone of this oft-repeated question gave the children the secret conviction that really they must be different from everybody else, and that this difference was a crime. On that account they tried eagerly to believe that they were not different after all, implying in their answers to their mother's query that they were repudiating a ridiculous and disgraceful charge of stupidity and vanity. Thus

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was bred in each of them the notion that to believe they might be different from other people was foolish, false, and wicked, and the emotional atmosphere which nourished this belief was so heavily charged that orthodoxy on the point became for everyone concerned (as orthodoxies always do) a matter of the most serious moment.

VI

IT seemed sometimes to Roland as though he had two selves which led different lives. One self led its life in term time, the other in the holidays; the one under purely female leadership, that of Janet, or his nurse; the other under purely male leadership, that of Danny.

But he led yet a third and more curious life, one which was both female and male, as it were, at the same time; that was under the leadership of his mother, or nurse, or sister, *and* Danny. When these two leaders came into conflict, then, not knowing how to maintain his allegiance consistently to only one of them, Roland would try to elude the problem, though he felt rather ashamed, by serving sometimes one, sometimes the other, according simply to whichever was ascendant. If he did compel himself to attack the solution, it was more than he could bear. The solution was to give unto Cæsar those things which were Cæsar's, and unto Cæsar's mother those which were hers; to reconcile both emperor and empress dowager to their portions and each other, and escape being used for whipping boy in return.

Life Number 3 was a spiritual hermaphrodite's.

And his fourth, least lived and least important, life was his own, his very own. Life Number 4 (he used in later years to think of his life in this

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way and to refer in his mind to Life Number 1, or 2, or 3) had at present very little look in. He seemed to be spending most time in Numbers 1 and 2—Feminine and Masculine—and they were getting out of control, and too frequently changing into that minor third, Hermaphrodite.

Roland was the youngest, but when he was with his brother he felt far older than Janet. In term time the children were divided into "the elder ones" and "the younger ones," the former being away at school, the latter at home. But when all four were together in the holidays, the other arrangement of "the boys" and "the girls" was also frequently used. When Roland was a "younger one" he glowered; when he was a "boy" he was content. At the beginning of the holidays he could not have too much of Dan's company, but, after a week or so, was also hankering, against his own ambition, to return to his nursery amusements with his sister. "The elder ones," moreover, were allowed to make expeditions which "the younger ones" were not. Thus Roland found himself, sooner or later, being torn in two, and the brother and sister, who were bidding for his allegiance, in jealous, if subdued, hostility. Through no fault, through no wish, of his own, Roland found himself at an early age used like a pawn.

Daniel was older than Janet, who felt this strongly, just as she resented his boy's advantages, which were repeatedly impressed upon her by nurse.

"Danny does it—why can't I?" Janet complained.

"Danny is a boy. You're only a little girl,"

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nurse replied, qualifying thereby for all the fires of hell, and enunciating her axiom with a benign patience admirably suited, in her opinion, to the puny intelligences entrusted to her. "Besides, he's older than you are."

"Ha! Ha! You're only a girl! I told you so!" joined in Danny, prompt to take advantage of the nurse's stupidity. "Why can't I—I—I?" he mocked. "Why can't I—I—I?"

"Huh-kha, huh-kha, huh-kha!" sobbed Janet. "Daniel's mimickin' me-e-e! 'S not fair, Nanny, 's not f-fair!"

And she dashed after Danny and kicked his shins as hard as she could, trying to find in each venomous fling an outlet for her sore, taunted spirit.

Every time she tried direct conclusions with Danny she had the worst of it, and always somehow she provoked from her elders not sympathy but blame. The result was not to kill but to fan in her the need for paying Danny out, and proving that she was superior to him. Thus the impulse which already existed in her to stress by action her seniority to Roland was also forced into doing duty for her impulse to get even with Daniel. To her natural affection for Roland was now added a sense of power and possession, and Roland had to serve as a dumping-ground for all the feelings which Janet had displaced from his brother. Here, at any rate, was one boy to whom she was, and always would be, senior.

It became increasingly important for Janet to prove herself stronger than Danny in the one

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sphere where he presumed to reign undisturbed—in Roland's affection. For that reason she strove to make Roland fonder of and more dependent on her than on Daniel. Her need for a playmate became subordinate to her craving for a conquest, and for the acknowledgment by Danny, Nanny and the world that she was in no true sense junior to Daniel any longer.

Knowing that she fought a losing—nay, a lost—battle, she was often wild and frantic in her behaviour, and erratic in her affection for Roland. For the opposite reason, Daniel was just the reverse. Hence Roland, who started as sensitive as both of them, and who, through his uncomfortable bufferdom grew more so than either, gradually came to feel, but without perceiving how all the odds were on his brother's side, which of the two was the surer and dearer companion.

It did not, however, follow that Roland could resist an intensive attack by his sister, should she decide to make one. Indeed, it was at such a time that he endured most pain—when his spirit dictated one thing, and his sister another, Daniel standing in the background, outwardly pretending ignorance of Roland's conflict, actually aware that it was in progress, though never of the degree of its intensity.

Daniel never brought direct pressure to bear on Roland; he merely told him what he thought, if Roland asked him, and left the power of Roland's hero-worship to do the rest.

It was, perhaps, just because Roland in reality craved a leader to whom he might surrender the

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burdens of initiative, decisions, and independence of every sort, that he was incapable of resisting the demands or the pressure of anyone who assumed such a relation towards him. He grew up finding the things he wanted to do already done; the unknown things he wanted to explore, explored. Thus some part of the zest for life was stolen from him, and he repeatedly found himself left with nothing better than to repeat what he had already witnessed someone else achieve for the first time before him. He seemed doomed to serve his brother and sisters as a reminder that at any moment they were better than he at anything he might try to do, and so provoke them by his first attempts to remind him that, even should these succeed, they would only be baby triumphs, outshone long ago by their own more advanced accomplishments, devoid of interest, and therefore far better left unmade.

If he did succeed in accomplishing a feat for the first time, his jubilant "Look what I've done!" was invariably met by the patronising depreciation of at least one of three children all older than himself.

He could never escape from this ignominious inferiority. With that peculiar power possessed by children for touching one another on the raw, one or other of his brother or sisters seemed always to be harping on Roland's inexperience, his babyishness, on the fact that he was the youngest and did not "count." They seemed to be aware that the jibe made him wince, and to know how oppressed

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he was by a fact which, though it was his fault, and to their credit, least of all, had only to be stated in terms of accusation to make him feel guilty.

He cast round in his mind with despair for some retort, for some blemish in one of his brethren by which he might triumphantly check their self-confident cruelty and make them experience themselves something of his torment. But an open taunt—the very thing whereby to achieve this most unequivocally—was beyond his courage. To come out in open defiance, open hostility; to take the initiative in breaking an alliance, the offer of which he was expected to consider a gracious condescension; to declare point-blank that he harboured (sinfully) feelings of hostility, ingratitude, revolt, towards his self-appointed benefactors—before the resolution to do any of these things he quailed.

So again, as when he had tried to fight his mother of “resting” in the train, he was unable to defend himself with the proper weapons; and his desire for retaliation, pushed underground for the time being, emerged at others socially, and to outward appearances even logically, quite unsuited. By so doing he brought greater suffering upon himself than ever. Whereas he, Roland, might be cloudily aware of why he was bringing such emotional intensity to a situation apparently trivial in itself and having no connection with any quarrel or previous situation, spectators were utterly insensible to such emotional continuity in a child’s attitude to another person. To them Roland’s passions on occasions where there seemed no adequate

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cause, even childish cause, appeared senseless, unseemly, perverse.

"Bread and butter, please, Janet," he asked, and "Bread and butter, please, Daniel," Janet handed on.

Daniel passed it rather slowly, either with intent to aggravate or merely because he felt lethargic, and Janet did the same. Roland's face burned, a dragon's head wrenched and tore its way up his throat, and before the plate had reached him he was kicking, grabbing, screaming. If the plate was not in his grasp *at once*, he felt his body would be ripped in pieces by the sword of anger that leaped and rent him from within. He was powerless; they could hold that plate under his nose for ever, their eyes laughing into his with contemptuous, veiled mockery, which told him plainly that Daniel or Janet knew that their actions must be maddening; which was why they were behaving so, that they knew too how the grown-ups would not perceive it, and would therefore consider Roland as creating a scene without the least excuse—which blindness would refine the pleasure in the game.

But if it was hateful to have older brothers and sisters who were always ahead of one, it was equally hateful to have a younger brother who was perpetually competing for the attention of one's mother. Roland was always being favouritised, or, it seemed to the other children, about to be, which came to the same thing. If they were for ever depriving him of his triumphs, he was always, always, stealing from them their share of affection, whether

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their mother's, or their nurse's. He was petted, pardoned, helped, because he was "the youngest." Always for that reason, which the little demon knew, and tweaked them with, whenever their mother's presence gave him protection.

The elder children's jealousy was exacerbated by their mother's pious formula of "no favouritising."

"You know, you all mean the same to me," she declared, yielding to her sentimental and sententious mood. "Father always used to say how foolish and dreadful it was when parents made favourites among their children. He was quite right, and I've always remembered it and acted on it—haven't I?"

"Of course!" "Yes!" "Yes!" "Of course!" came in embarrassed murmurs from her four evenly blessed issue.

"Well, now," Mrs. Greer concluded, the jury having shown this satisfactory unanimity, "it's time for you all to go upstairs. But, Roley, if you are a very good boy you may stay in mummy's room while she finishes her letters. Would you like to, Roley-Poley?"

"Oo, yes!" Poley made reply, obliterating instantly the reflection that it might cost him dear in the nursery later on. Even if it did, it was worth while. It was generally only when alone with his mother that he was able to obtain any pleasure from her company, or that her affection could make her behave affectionately.

Thus were the ding and dong of these children's struggles for a fair share of stable affection main-

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tained; thus did motherly love and ignorance and nursely gentility and care succeed in undermining rather than consolidating any emotional foundations which these two girls and two boys might have built up in their youth.

In consequence all four children became oversensitised in one direction or another, if not in all. Not only could their emotions be roused far more easily, but they were roused to a far higher pitch, and far oftener, than should have been.

A situation which would have irritated other children wounded these, and since the family lived, on account of its poverty, and Mrs. Greer's notions of propriety, a perpetually communal life, every one of them was repeatedly reacting on the others. But the children's different ages, their difference of sex, and the ill-considered intervention of their mentors resulted in now one brother or sister being the enemy, now another.

To the child who was at the most sensitive age when this general emotional confusion was at its height, the consequences were appalling. He hardly ever knew where he stood in relation to anyone, and since everyone was older than he, and therefore more powerful and to be feared, to his uncertainty were added constant stress and a dreadful insecurity.

At one time the battle was children *versus* adults, at another, between boys and girls, and at another "the younger ones" against "the elder ones." Every one of Roland's intimates had been both his enemy and his ally many times. That they had been the one last time was no evidence that they would not

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be the other next. While such a state of affairs might have taught an adult never to emerge from a cautious neutrality towards any of them, such restraint and voluntary starvation were impossible for a child. Hence Roland was flung, despite himself, into a *mêlée* from which he was never able to extricate himself entirely. He was passionately hating, as only children can hate, one day, one moment even, the brother or sister, the governess or mother, whom he was adoring, hero-worshipping, or slavishly obeying the next.

While he floundered among the boggy emotional entanglements of his family life, he was also oppressed by the repeated breakdown of his efforts to maintain the isolation of the strong, silent man. It was only to be expected that this attempt to achieve what would be at best a barren victory for an ancient of eighty brought more harm than help to a Benjamin of eight.

Instead of growing less vulnerable, he grew more; far from growing more independent, he grew less. As the fleeting domination of one person was succeeded by another's, so Roland's feelings for each in turn changed, till he was swirled, helpless and dizzy like a dazed bee, into a vortex from which there was no escape.

VII

THESE holidays the attack came from the Church.

Alexia went to a day-school where she met and suffered from her nonconformity with Christian girls. Mingled with her passions for the prettier girls and the more beautiful mistresses was a desire to be like them (for, despite, or on account of, Mrs. Greer's most terrible admonitions, she felt only too different) and a humble determination to be worthy of them.

What easier or more obvious beginning was there than to be Christian? Absence from school on Saturdays always brought comment there on Mondays, and questions in the Scripture hour awkward moments of public confession. Besides, the favourite object of Alexia's passion was herself so devout (wearing an ivory cross from a chain round her throat) that Alexia was quite unable to resist the lure.

A new and unsolicited convert, she was eager in her turn to open her sister's eyes to the spiritual bliss awaiting one who gave up the dull, dry, unintelligible Hebrew theology. Janet, again, flattered at the confidence of the eldest of the family, thrilled at so real a spiritual adventure, became more ardent than the orthodox.

The two little girls practised their new faith in

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secrecy, and it seemed clear to them that, Jewesses under duress as they were, it was no crime to go to a synagogue on Saturdays when their hearts were really given to Jesus on Sundays. And, though the defiling flesh of pig was tabooed in their home, they devoted most of their time when playing shop to the purveying of bacon.

A more scientific, philosophic outlook, an emotional inaccessibility to religious appeal, left Daniel as unmoved by the call of his sisters' new faith as were any of them by their mother's Jewish orthodoxy. He did not share in their girlish overflow of passion or sentimental enthusiasm—he did not wish to be dragged into this silly business at all.

But by offending his sisters in this matter, he fanned into flame once more the rivalry which always smouldered just below the surface of their companionship. Janet's resentment found its usual tortuous outlet: she set out, since Danny scoffed, to capture his lieutenant; then her elder brother might scoff the other side of his face.

She could not, however, have embarked on Roland's conversion to Christianity only for the sake of snubbing Daniel; she had to share her new sensations, and the new religion whose rules it was a pleasure to obey, in phantasy, even if impossible in practice. The ascetic, guttural Judaism was an uninspiring burden which seemed in practice to hinder every pleasure. It was only when Roland's reluctance to go over finally and absolutely began to be traceable to the influence of Daniel, that Janet was roused passionately and became not so

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much determined as inwardly compelled to fight for the possession of Roland to her last resource.

While no more had been involved than playing at pork butchers and drawing crosses, Roland had acquiesced amiably, and had felt that infinite superiority to his benighted mother which old-fashioned missionaries may be supposed to have felt towards the heathen.

Even in a little clandestine recitation of the Lord's Prayer he had acquiesced happily. Jesu, Christ, and Jesus, Jesus Christ and Christ Jesus as variants for the One Jewish God, and "Aymen" instead of "Ahmen" were all enticements at first, even though accompanied by obscurity and danger. Obscurity, indeed, for how funny, if he were to be occasionally hailed as Greer Roland, or Rola, and funny, too, nurse appeared to think it, when he told her what he had decided his new name was to be. But neither she nor Janet explained. On the contrary, their amusement convinced him that, since his logic had been held ridiculous, reason must exist for this unique method of nomenclature too obvious to decent rational folk to require explanation.

So much for the obscurity.

But danger was there, too, for his mother scowled and flushed angrily when "Aymen" was uttered in her presence. She made it quite clear (none of her children could have told whether she had said this explicitly, but they would all have asserted it to be true till put to the torture) that "Aymen" was not only non-Jewish, that is Christian, Godless,

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irreligious and heathen, but that, like Mammy for Mummy, it was common.

"Please God," implored Roland morning and evening, "bless Father an' Mother, La an' Dan an' Janet, Gran'mother, an' Unc' Myer, Uncle Freddie an' Aunt Lia, an' help me to be a good boy. Ahmen."

He always laid ardent emphasis upon the *Ah* to make quite sure that his pure Jewish intentions would attract his mother's notice. For after what had taken place on occasions there would have been no use in taking risks.

"Remember, Roland," his mother had once fiercely admonished, "yours is the finest religion in the world!"

"Yes, mother," he had replied obediently.

But he was not inspired. He was not even interested. No flame of fanatical religious zeal ever burned in him. Religion supplied no want; it took its place in his mind merely as one of the inexplicable encumbrances deposited autocratically by adults upon his path of life. Roughly speaking, religion was what you did on Saturdays. But why it was encased in those extraordinary hieroglyphics; was concerned with Jahveh and Moses and Solomon and stone blocks; and why it tabooed, through the priestly interpretations of Mrs. Greer, Christ Jesus and Saints, Roland had no idea.

No explanation was ever proffered either as to the connection between himself and the extraordinary jumble of adventure stories, rules, and obscure *vers libre* which he gathered comprised

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"The Bible," or as to the quarrel which had apparently taken place between all his relations on the one hand and people called Christians on the other, and in which the exploits of the other side had, it seemed, been too indecent to be mentioned. Roland's bewilderment was intensified by his deduction that many of his mother's friends were Christians. With these people his mother was to all appearances on the best of terms, yet in her "finest religion" moments, and at others on Saturdays, Christians were condemned, as being the most frightful enemies and sinners, to the sternest fate that righteousness could devise.

Why Roland had been made a Jew did not in the first place seem clear. What all the pother was about as between "Jews" and "Christians" was utterly impossible to discover in the second. Why have Jews and Christians at all? Why keep Saturday rather than Sunday, or Sunday rather than Saturday? Why have "religion"? Why have a "God" at all?

It was all very well, but how did one know that He even existed? And of what use was He if He did? Roland felt on the one hand that there was *prima facie* evidence in favour of His existence because his mother said so, but he was perfectly aware on the other that that could not be the whole story. After all, she had not made Him, or got Him up her sleeve, and she only referred, when she was pressed, to higher authorities who apparently stood to her in the same intellectual relation as she to Roland.

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"If you are good, God will always answer your prayers," she explained one day, when Roland had been naughty.

"Then why," asked Roland, knowing what both his mother and himself most wanted, "why does God not bring back Daddy?"

For "Where is Daddy?" he had inquired tenderly and with soft awe, when his mother had wept about his father at her son's bed.

"Ah, he has gone away, darling, very far away," she had replied, "there are more things in Heaven and earth" implied clearly in every syllable.

And Roland supposed that his father, whom he had been brought up to regard as the soul of nobility and courtesy, must have lost his memory, or simply been cut off from a post office or a railway station. God, then, was the only hope for bringing him back again.

Yet, "Ah, dear," his mother sighed, "there are some prayers God can never answer."

Roland felt miserable on his mother's account and resentful against this stupid magnate who was willing to do everything except the one thing that was wanted. Roley had not the heart to tax his mother with the inconsistency of her replies about God's amenability to prayer, for he was too much overcome by her own sad face and crying eyes. But he did wish she would see the uselessness of her theory and give up her old God.

A fatal legacy which mother handed on to children was this power to remain undisturbed by inconsistencies, even to become oblivious to them. Just

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as she could be gentle and crazy by turns, tell the children they were her joy and her torment according to her mood, so was bred in them, alongside of intellectual powers equal to, if not above, the normal, the facility for believing such contradictions, each in turn. As she brushed aside logic when it stood in the way of her passions, so she deprived her children of its support when they might have supported themselves by it.

The dominant fact was that they always took the lead given by their mother. If she became angry, they grew guilty; if she was gentle, they were happy. Thus one day Roland's father had "died," or been "killed"; on another "gone away"; and on any given day the children forgot one terminology for the other as completely (even more so) as did their mother.

Jesus, then, had his attractions. God had pretty well given the game away; Jesus had yet to be tested. Circumstances, therefore, certainly favoured Janet when she set out to make a proselyte, and it looked as though the power with which she had to contend was more likely to prove budding rationalism than Judaism, orthodox or liberal.

The obscure beginnings of rationalism, too, found promising ground in Danny, who, having thirteen or fourteen years to Roland's eight, filled the latter's need for a more articulate instrument of expression than he could himself provide. Roland could not have said where the dividing line came between Dan's rôle of summariser of his brother's thoughts, and propagandist of his own. Certainly Daniel was

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now one, now the other, though nobody perceived this. Janet, naturally, felt that Roland copied their elder brother, and never more nor less, which only galled Roland if flung at him as a taunt when they were bickering, or insinuated during general and otherwise amicable conversation.

The difference in temperament between Roland's brother and sister was most marked. Dan was calm, decisive, confident; Janet, emotional, contradictory, unstable. Their prey acquired only the appearances of the one and nothing of value from the other. He pretended to be calm when he was quaking, decided when he was too scared to think, and confident when it seemed to him that in another instant he must give in to Janet's upbraidings, and burst into ignominious and unhappy tears.

Why couldn't he be left alone? Did he really care whether he was a Christian or a Jew? His mother was Jewish; his relatives were Jewish; he apparently was Jewish. Then Jewish let it be; only consider it settled. Like the side on which he parted his hair, the question did not seem to have any material effect upon life, nor to be in itself important; it was only serious while it remained a dispute.

Still, Roland could not resist taking up one position or another when challenged so forcibly by his sister, and so presumptuously by his brother. But, drawn into a conflict against his will, compelled to displease at least one of two people, either or both of whom he would have been content just to follow, his resentment, if neither his real desires nor

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his beliefs, found an outlet. True, his resentment was, for preference, disguised, and was, like Janet's against his elder brother, displaced on to other focus points, where Roland's moral and logical position could not be assailed. But even when no convenient disguise presented itself, were he goaded beyond a certain length, as he repeatedly was through his brother's and sister's immature generalship, he had to hit back.

His reluctance to do so was enormous, because his first outbursts in this direction had always been met by the dreadfully overweighted punishments of his mother. Not physical punishment, but the appalling terror of the withdrawal of her love. Threats to go away and leave him, never to see him again, never to love him any more, at a period of his life and hers when, whether his mother was lovable or not, infant Roland needed her love, depended on it, could grow securely only with it for his conscious and unconscious background—threats such as these had produced in him shockingly premature self-control which could not but become a pathological submissiveness.

To be threatened, when he grew deliberately aggravating, with a smacking; for his petulance to be met by petulance would have presented him with a choice which he would have been quite able to make, and in the long run Nature would have had her way. Sometimes temper, and childish vitality, would have refused to be gainsaid; he would have shouted with all the pygmy spleen that filled him, "You beast! You pig! You fool! You liar, you!

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"I hate you! I hate you! I *hate* you!" He could have hurled his toys out of his pram and kicked at his mother or his nurse till the tempest had passed. He would have had his smacking, and been told he was a perfect little nuisance.

At other times, if the smart of his smacking had lingered, as quite suitably it might, he could doubtless have followed his second thoughts, and not his first—or rather, his thoughts and not his impulses—and decided that with the help of the sulks it would probably be worth while to contain himself. Action and reaction, ding-dong, would have had their way.

But when petulance was met by fury, kicks by hurricane shakings, by his mother's fist flourished villainously under his nose, by her teeth clenched, her eyes flashing crazy passion, and her face dark red with murder, his heart froze, the miniature tornado of his own wrath sank flat away into nothing, and he waited in hysterical rigidity for the expected death blow to descend.

No wonder he violated his instincts, and suppressed his natural appetites, for the sake of a protraction, however provisional, of a social existence, however insecure.

Nor were his mother's better intentioned efforts to give him outlet for his hostile feelings better instructed.

"I'm sure you can't love an ugly old woman like me," she suggested with macabre pleasantry. "Now, wouldn't you far sooner have a tall, beautiful mother with blue eyes and auburn hair? I'm sure you would."

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"No, of course I wouldn't! And I do love you," Roland reassured her with desperate conviction, transfixed in terror lest he had betrayed himself.

Not that he did yearn for blue eyes and auburn hair, but it must palpably stand to reason, so it seemed to him, that anyone in his position would prefer a different sort of mother from the one he had. Yet he felt aware, and rightly, of the trap within the humorous setting; so that he was far too much terrified to laugh with his mother at her horrible joke, even though he realised he might displease her by not doing so.

Indeed, he was caught both ways. If he did not laugh, he must have some reason for taking the jest so seriously, and if he did, it was presumptive evidence that what she ascribed to him was true. Mrs. Greer's invitation to Roland, therefore, to admit to her that her diagnosis was correct, appeared to him like the wiles of a gaoler who tries to trick his prisoner into betraying his guilt. Roland's blood froze when his feelings for his mother were thus called by her in question, and, far from enabling him to relieve himself of his hate, she drove his guiltiness still more deeply into him, and only showed him how unavailing had been his efforts at disguise.

Not to let anyone see, then, what you really felt, was a corollary which, it is not difficult to understand, provided at least the bed in which to sow the seeds of hypocrisy. And more: Epictetus, with his "Know Thyself," would never come into his own. Never? Perhaps, but at what price?

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This worm, then, turned long after other worms would have turned in the same circumstances. Even as worms go, as worms turn, this worm stayed exceptionally long in the straight way. Only when Roland had been brought to hysterical pitch, when it seemed that even the extreme penalty which he always felt awaited him was no longer the worse alternative, and that he had "nothing to lose but his chains," only then did he rebel, shut his eyes, and hit, hit, hit. All his pent-up impulses of self-assertion, of aggressiveness, of temper, and hate, tumbled out in a torrent of childish frenzy, a fatalistic self-abandoning passion to be killed for a sheep.

Thus the Christianity conflict was set upon an emotional ground, none knew how unchristian, and became a struggle for his soul in a sense different from what Janet's infantile coquetry with Christ Jesus would have wished; instead of a mock struggle for the possession of it between the Holy Ghost and Satan, it became a struggle for the possession of his own soul, his very life, free from the tyranny of sister or brother, brother or mother.

VIII

WALKING these holidays through the meadows and the lanes Janet and Roland made their way to a cool, secluded bower under the drooping branches of two trees. Here they held their Divine Service; here they bought and sold their pork sausages and bacon.

But this afternoon Roland approached this veritable money changing in the Temple with a quaking heart.

The previous evening, after he and Daniel had gone to bed and started upon their usual nocturnal conversation, carried on in the dark as they lay in parallel beds in the room, which, as a holiday privilege, they were allowed to share, their talk had turned for a moment upon religion. If it had not been for the tension of the Janet situation, religion would have been discussed by the two little boys like any other topic. But, because they knew at this time, that, if it were discussed, they would really be discussing something else more crucial, religion was avoided.

Roland avoided it for two reasons: he felt guilty in his brother's company of having been participating in his sister's heretical pleasures; and a direct reference would inevitably provoke his brother's opinion, or probably, still worse, his advice. And for Roland, Daniel's advice was a command, and

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if Daniel commanded, Roland's spirit came under a spell and would obey. But to obey Daniel would mean defying Janet; defying Janet would be resisting a Fury. Fighting a Fury or displeasing God—which could he choose? Oh, that God might spare him the dilemma, and allow him to serve both unchallenged!

Daniel avoided at this time a discussion on the puzzle of religion, lest it should draw him into a direct condemnation of their younger sister, which would probably hurt Roley. Daniel, however, though he wanted to be kind, was determined to be king; he did not want to fight, but, by Jingo, if he did! . . . Even so he did not realise the tension to which Roland would be put, nor the impetus of either contrary force, between which and against which Roland was striving to maintain his equilibrium.

Nevertheless the shunned topic had come upon them—come between them. How, neither brother could have explained. Each wished to avoid it; each knew the other so wished; but each knew too that, since to discuss it would have been far more natural, its avoidance must affect the sincerity of their conversation—even their relationship. Considered so, the tabooed subject would be better touched on, and put out of the way, once for all, settled.

Roland's submerged conflict between going his own way and following his brother's caused him discomfort, and made him in Dan's presence feel guilty. Dan, too, must perceive his follower's desire to de-

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sert. To demonstrate the reverse, Roland was impelled to take the bull by the horns, challenge his brother's suspicions, or imagined suspicions, and in fact bring about the very thing which he dreaded. Merely to have mentioned the subject would have given Roland no peace; he must needs punish himself by introducing it in the form of seeking for advice.

"What shall I say to her?" he had suicidally asked, after explaining to Dan how the position seemed to be changing before the pressure of Janet's ardour from a game to a crusade.

The fate that he was determining for himself at this moment was lost from sight in his earnest desire to show off to his brother how beautifully they were in harmony, and how completely he was at heart Dan's partisan and lieutenant.

"You know, if I were you," replied Dan, "I would just give the whole thing up. It's really not worth while, and it's all rather rot, isn't it?"

"Yes, I think I will," assented Roland; "I think so too." And they changed the conversation, which, shaken a little by this interlude, succumbed soon to drowsiness. A score of years—was it one over?—these wiseacres combined.

Next morning Roland awoke a condemned man. Though he might decently dally for a day or two, he must, and that sooner than later, screw himself to the sticking point—his and Dan's words had put escape for ever out of reach. In any case his own conscience would never let him openly submit to any Christian challenge from Janet, while elaborate

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attempts to avoid that challenge, as in similar situations with his mother, would only be certain to provoke it.

No wonder his heart beat on this pleasant afternoon, as Janet and he drew near to their secret playground. Here was Life Number 3—the Hermaphrodite need make no mistake.

“Come on, let’s play shop first,” Janet suggested, “and then, when we’ve taken home the bacon to Cook, we’ll have Church. I’ll be Vicar to-day, and you be the congregation. I’ll give you your catechism.”

“Well—all right,” Roland agreed feebly, temporising, hoping desperately that even the Jewish God, even the Jesus he was about to abandon, might come to his rescue and take pity on him.

“But . . .” he hesitated, then continued: “Look, let’s only do shopping to-day. I want to go and play with Dan. He’s got a solid india-rubber pill he’s brought back from school these holls. He swopped it with a chap last term. He’s coming to stay this holls, you know. Next week. He’s called Max Fairley.”

“Pill?” queried his sister. “What do you mean?”

“Why, don’t you know? A ball, of course, you fool!” snubbed Roland, with sudden inexplicable nastiness.

“Oh!

“Well, anyhow, I don’t want to play with a pill,” refused Janet, pricked by this pin’s point. “And you promised, Roley! How can you forget!

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We *said* we'd do a catechism to-day. You remember!"

"Yes . . . But . . . Well, anyhow, I don't want to," Roland flung defiantly. "So let's have shop."

And he began, trusting that the matter was over, to push into position the stones and logs which were used for chairs and shop counters, and the pebbles, leaves, and sticks which served them as coins and rashers.

"No, I won't!" Janet stamped her foot in temper, petulance growing hot. "If you won't be catechised, I won't play shop. Roley, you *must* be catechised! We haven't prayed to Jesus at all yet to-day, and you know we always do at least once. Why don't you want to? It isn't really because of Dan's pill! Why won't you? You must. We *must* pray to Jesus! Buying bacon isn't any good alone. We can't just be Christians like that!"

"I'm *not* a Christian! I don't want to be a Christian! It's all rather rot, anyway. And it's not worth while. I'm just going to give the whole thing up," retorted the worm, quoting as it turned. "So there!" it added, turning a complete circle while about it.

"Roley! How can you! What will Jesus say when He hears you! You know, He can hear everything we say. He's everywhere. I'm a Christian, and you are too. Oh! I know! Dan's been making you say all this. But——"

"It's *not* Dan! You always say that, you

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beast!" shrieked Roland, now on the verge of tears, and touched to the quick. How he had hoped, if he did rebel, at least to be taken seriously! To be discovered as an imitator saved him none of the anguish and deprived him of all the glory.

"It is! It is! I know it is!" shouted back his sister, also touched, for she on her side would have preferred a fight with Roland himself to a disguised attack by her old, hateful enemy. But she knew that she was right, and for that reason she could rest at no compromise. Roland must choose. If he were going to transfer his allegiance, he must be made to see that he would still be a vassal; if he sought Dan's support in order to attack her, he must bear the brunt of her hostility to his supporter.

So the two children screamed at each other for the afternoon, Roland gradually being battered into incoherence, unable to argue, unwilling to choose. Yet "Choose! You must choose!" Janet reiterated. "Think, Roley! Jesus will hate you always if you turn Jewish again. You'll go to Hell! You will! I'll never play with you again. And when Dan goes back to school, I'll break your soldiers, and I won't let you play with my dolls. And I'll never play shop with you again. No, never!

"You must be Christian, Roley. Choose, now. You must choose for ever! Think! Now, I'll go behind that bush over there and I'll give you five minutes. You always say that's a long time when Nanny puts you in the corner. I'll come back in five minutes. And if you don't say 'Christian' I'll hate you as hard as I can for ever. So there!"

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But Roland did not want five minutes; he did not want five seconds. They would be employed, could be employed, not in choosing, but only in lamentation. A greater power than he, of which he felt himself to be but the vehicle, had chosen for him. The five minutes would be a useless torment, such as they must be to a prisoner, who, condemned to death, has been forced to dig his own grave, and granted five minutes in which to contemplate it.

So powerful was Dan's domination over his small brother, that Roland could not grasp that Janet did not feel it likewise. Did she not see that her rebellion was waste of time, that, though she might fancy herself an irresistible force, Dan was an immovable object? After all, Roland was the buffer between their impact, and a buffer ought to know. Although as yet less specific and less material, similar relations not infrequently arose between his mother and Dan, and in these emotional impacts likewise Roley was a buffer. Life was littered with irresistible forces and immovable objects. Roley might have considered himself an expert buffer, for he had in some way survived, and though he remained powerless to prevent the collisions, he acquired a certain measure of skill in delaying them, and could distinguish unerringly between authentic and apparent. The present case, though the collision might be invisible, was authentic.

The personalities of his sister and his brother faded from his mind; he knew only that he was in pain. Nothing he could do seemed of any use to put an end to it. For he was powerless to retract

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his recantation, as powerless as if forbidden at the dagger's point. Truly, Daniel was king.

Standing on the mound of stones, which Roland had begun to pile up for their unplayed game, Janet, the respite over, delivered her final despairing harangue. She was chittering with anger.

Well, it was plainer sailing than with their mother. "Do you understand me, Roland? I'm not angry, only grieved," Mrs. Greer would coo silkily in the lull which, brought on by her exhaustion after a paroxysm of anger, generally punctuated her tirades. "Not angry, only grieved!" thought Roland. "Oh no, you're not angry! Not angry!" His mother certainly knew how to have her cake and eat it. Janet at least did not pretend only to be "grieved." She made no secret that she was angry too, wildly, ferociously.

Shaking her clenched hands, trembling, pointing her finger like a miniature, impassioned prophetess, she called on her rebel follower to surrender. But, hiccoughing with sobs, tears darkening his vision, and shaking his head in reluctant, speechless negative, the deserter, faint and well-nigh destroyed by his effort, remained obdurate and outcast.

"Then I hate you more than everybody else in the world, and I'll never talk to you again! I hope Jesus will hurt you as *hard* as He can! You're a hateful, horrid beast, and a liar, and a devil!"

Janet sprang off the mound, snatched aside the bushes, and ran away from her brother out of sight. Lurching childishly, choking with horrible snivels, he followed behind, too much overcome to do more

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than trot clumsily after her. "Nimmy! Nimmy! Don't leave me berhind! D-D-Don't l-l-leave me berhind!"

But he was left behind. Janet, burning with the shame of defeat, hating every boy, hating her mother, hating her nurse, hating everybody and everything, ran fast, with savage briskness, out of the lane and back up to the house.

Life Number 3 vanished; the gordian knot of this Siamese Hermaphrodite was severed; Life Number 2, The Male, reigned once again alone.

IX

IN its way, the aftermath of the quarrel was as painful as the quarrel itself. However tell-tale swollen eyelids, sulks, or avoidance of direct conversation between the two antagonists, might be, dignity and apparent future security compelled estrangement; for, if the hatchet were buried without delay, the cause of the war immediately became frivolous in the eyes of each participant; his or her tribulations, ludicrous and vain; and the chance that he would be able to outlast and conquer his next opponent next time publicly rendered negligible.

That Roland neither could nor would continue for the rest of his life, of the holidays, perhaps even of the day, to refuse to have any intercourse with his sister might be clear. But the logic of the corollary, that in those circumstances he had better "make it up" at once, even so had little power against the dread of being laughed at for inconsistent action and babyish will. So the conflict between dignity and grace took its course, until the original trouble had receded far enough into the past for the inconsistency of unbending now to seem, somehow, no longer intellectually disreputable, and to be morally balanced by the gain in peace and amity.

How grateful was each child for any incident that induced resumption of normal relations without

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forcing him or her to take the first step of surrender. To eat one's words was dreadful. It was the one piece of behaviour which could not be defended by logic, however flimsy, however conventional. It exposed one absolutely to the mercy of others, and this was so uncertain, so irrationally and erratically given, that to cast oneself upon it demanded well-nigh the courage of despair.

Hence, no matter who had been fighting, they always pursued conversational decoys with alacrity after a battle. The fact that all members of the Greer family had had so many common experiences, including, and especially, that of fighting, often induced some of those not engaged at the moment to take pity on those that were. It was the former who provided the decoys, and set the tone of scrupulous avoidance of the dangerous subject.

But even so, the turn of the hostile parties for describing their recreations was, if a semblance of naturalness were to be maintained, bound to arrive.

"And what did you do before tea, Roley? Did you and Janet go and play in the woods again?" asked Mrs. Greer.

As his lips began to form a convenient paraphrase in reply, Roland cast a rapid, anxious glance surreptitiously at Janet. Would she give him away? Was she still so angry that she was prepared to destroy herself for the sake of destroying him? Or was she sufficiently aware of their mother's presence to co-operate, if he gave a lead, in preventing a first-class explosion?

"We had meant," he might have replied, "to

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play at being Christians; at least we both have been Christians for ages, but Dan thinks it all rot, so I had to tell Janet I couldn't go on. Then she was beastly to me, and we quarrelled. I cried a lot, because I thought she was going to hurt me, but she wouldn't play with me, and we haven't spoken to one another again since." Roland could give this to his mother as his report for the afternoon; or he could invent. The former was as tempting as to walk up to a policeman and slap him in the face.

"Yes. We played for a bit and . . . what? Oh, just games. Um . . . Hide-and-Seek, and um . . . Steps, and um . . . um . . . Touch Wood.

"Then I wanted to play with Dan's solid india-rubber pill, so we came back.

"Janet went and picked those Pin-Cushions with La, after I left her," he added, challenging his younger sister gently, and conveying to his other one for the first time what help he needed from her.

He saw Nimmy look down at her plate to escape his gaze, and her nostrils quiver. He saw her lips open, and knew that she was speaking, without knowing what it was she said.

Janet allowed a fraction of a pause longer after her brother had finished speaking than was absolutely natural. In that hundredth of a second she decided a hundred times—the hundredth hundred—whether she should submit or whether she should burn.

"No," she contradicted—she would burn, and fire take them all—, "I didn't get Pin-Cushions with

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La at all. But . . . ” She saw Roland suddenly retch, and try to disguise it by choking over a crumb; she caught La’s eyes starting in terror, and Daniel scowling at her as he kicked her shins under the table. “. . . But,” she stuttered, “I went to the Pine Walk and climbed trees. I was in the Pin-Cushion field last night and couldn’t find any. So I went to see if that new boy with the bow and arrows was there again. I told him yesterday when we were bathing that I’d race him to the top of the biggest pine in the walk. The silly ass never came, though.”

“La, where did you get those Pin-Cushions?”

“Yes, I know,” La galumphed thankfully into the breach, “our field is empty now. But I got over the gate at the far end and found heaps more.”

“Just shows what a silly ‘backfisch’ you are, Janet, not to think of getting over the gate yourself! Specially as you’re such a wonderful climber!” mocked Daniel sardonically, covertly punishing his foe for daring to give them all such a turn.

“I’m not a backfisch, you fool!” snapped Janet. “You don’t know what a backfisch means! La’s a backfisch; she’s sixteen. I’m not.”

“Rot! You’re both backfisches, idiot! Ha! Backfisch!”

“Ha! Ha! Backfisch! Backfisch!” chirruped Roland, pointing his finger at La, with mysterious spitefulness and horrid ingratitude. He had not an inkling of what “backfisch” meant, but obviously it was a term of contempt for girls, and he imitated

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his brother passionately, unconsciously mimicking his intonation, and every detail of his manner.

"Copycat!" spat Janet. "Copycat! *You* can't say 'pretend'; you say, 'I'm only tendin'.' It's 'pretending,' baby! So shut up!"

"All right, well, anyway——"

"Children, stop it! . . . Janet! . . . Roland! . . . Don't bicker! And, Roley, hold your spoon properly.

"Daniel, it was your fault. You ought to know better. Chaffing is a different thing. Your father used to chaff me and everyone else, any amount; but there was one thing—he never lost his temper, never! And he was always kind and gentle.

"Yes, good-natured chaffing is fun, but this sort of bickering is not nice."

Mrs. Greer had noticed something directly at Janet's fateful hesitation. She could be no less quick than her children in her perceptions. Her reactions were quicker still. Only her self-control was slower.

From an abundance of motives she chose to accept Janet's original fiction, but when the tension transferred itself, and the children's overflow of pent emotions burst out on these irrelevant, stupid and non-existent issues, the general resistance to irritability was lowered, and Mrs. Greer became inclined to preach. Her sermons were invariably mixed with her memoirs, and, though both had been listened to time without number, they were a cheap price to pay for escape from worse things, and all the children felt so.

Just as a sudden wave upon calm water breaks,

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and rolls up against a wall, to be rolled back until it hits a rock, and then rills once again towards the wall, each journey reducing it to a more baby ripple, until at last it dies, so gradually the crest of danger in the children's conversation, as it passed from one impact to another, was worn down to harmless size, and finally subsided. Imperceptibly, management of the conversation became less necessary, the talk itself concerned more with the content of their childish day, and aimed goodwill was lost in spontaneity.

During the days following close upon the break with Janet, Roland's relations with his brother remained undisturbed, and his life with Janet very much the same. If he smarted from the pain inflicted by his subjection to Dan, it was without knowing why. Their companionship grew closer, and their experiments with the solid india-rubber pill threw Roland into a protracted ecstasy of delight. The performances and the properties of this exquisite novelty were demonstrated by Daniel, whom as its owner, and as the provider of endless pleasure in consequence, Roland loved and emulated more than ever before.

Excitement, of the order experienced whenever innovations were introduced into the family, spurted during the afternoon that Max, the ex-owner and origin of the pill, was due to arrive. It was less often, probably, than other children that the Greers had friends to stay, although, or partly because, Mrs. Greer was always pressing her children to do so.

For, when one's guest had arrived, one was so

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embarrassed as to what he would think of one's home, and one's Jewishness, so fearful of one's mother's outbursts, and so ashamed when these occurred, that such terrors, combined with Mrs. Greer's perverse interference in every game and plan, made a visit generally more a penance than a pleasure.

But these difficulties were felt more severely by the "younger ones." The "elder ones," especially the boy, as a person deriving entertainment from incalculable and scarcely rational sources, were left more to their own devices. The advent of Max, therefore, being the friend of one of "the elder ones," and a boy as well, was regarded by the children hopefully.

It was the first time since he had been to a boarding-school that Daniel had invited a school friend to stay. Never before within Roland's memory had there been three boys in the family. Children who came to tea were in a different class; even a whole day's picnic was not the same. In neither case did the "visitor" element disappear; in both cases a host of incidents remained, which formed an integral part of one's daily life, but in which the visitor did not share.

And besides these differences, Roland was able to distinguish a subtle difference between his mother's attitude to a child come to tea and one come to stay. He noticed that she was more maternal, more as she was to her own children, to a child who came to stay. A "tea" child, at the worst, she reproved; a visitor she might quite likely scold. The children themselves were both more friendly

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and more quarrelsome. The restraint to which they submitted in their personal opinions and their divisions of spoils, because these were imposed upon them by their elders, were more or less abandoned when a child came to stay. Sometimes, in fact, by the end of his visit a child seemed to the Greers more unpleasant, more tiresome, than they themselves did sometimes to one another.

Max was coming for a week or ten days; to Roland it seemed longer; long enough, in fact, for forming the friendship of a lifetime. But perhaps Max would be so big, and so accomplished that he would find the company of one so young and innocent of worldly experience too boring to endure. Roland was not sure. He foresaw the possibility of Max monopolising Danny, and of Danny, in deference to good manners, giving all his time with willing grace to Max. Even, Roland started in dismay, Danny might prefer Max's company to his. That was something which Roland had as yet never experienced.

How terrible! It would, too, be peculiarly inopportune, since he would be thrown more than ever into the company of Janet, and Roland still experienced from time to time, when he was alone with her, moments of embarrassment and guilt, and, whether Janet had the same or not, believed that she observed them.

"Oh, no," Danny reassured his brother, "Max is an awful sport. Besides, we can all play games together, even if it means with the girls. We'll play rounders. And Max plays draughts.

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We'll all have a tournament, like at school. He and I are going to make catapults; I'll show you how. He's got a new way."

Max was awaited by Roland with a mind which was filled with the images of catapults, draughtsmen, and pills—cricket pills, footer pills, fives pills, and india-rubber pills—and which was ready to believe that Max possessed mental powers and mechanical ingenuity even greater than Daniel's.

Above all, Max was a sport—an awful sport.

X

A YOUNG boy was walking up the garden path, accompanied by Daniel.

The two boys came into the sitting-room where Mrs. Greer and her other children, who had given up waiting for them when it was clear the train was late, were having tea. The boy was tall for his fourteen or fifteen years, and slim. He had smooth, auburn hair, a straight nose, a thin drooping mouth, and freckles. There was nothing Jewish about him; his blue eyes set a seal upon his Anglo-Saxon style of appearance.

He shook hands with everyone. His greeting with Mrs. Greer was youthfully elegant, worldly and self-possessed; with Alexia—his senior, but only a girl—polite and colourless; with Janet—a girl but his junior—companionable, but polite; with Roland—a boy, almost a baby—smiling, yet solemn.

Roland's mouth had remained an open cavity, enveloping, but not consuming, a wad of cake upon his tongue, and his eyes had been focused without a blink upon the door which was to open. It had opened, and his mouth, too, even wider, the wad of cake tilting unimpeded downwards over the tip of his tongue. In the general rising of the family from their seats his manners passed unnoticed, and he was able to push the misshapen pellet, tea-sodden, with carpet hairs, jammy additions and all,

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back into his mouth unobserved. But he was not sure that Max himself had not noticed him at the critical moment, and he had all too little time in which to pass the speech obstacle firmly behind his uvula, lick off the impolite stickiness from the fingers of his right hand, and wipe them on his jersey under the armpit, before his turn came to say how-do-you-do. He was grateful for once that his turn always came last. Generally, this public emphasis upon his juniority wounded him, especially when accompanied by some social jest of his mother's about "the baby of the family, even though he is growing into a big boy."

This, as his mother appeared to realise, though did not really, was precisely Roland's dread: he might grow as big as you could imagine—taller than his tall father, taller than his tall brother, but he would always be his mother's baby; between which, for him, was no difference and "a" baby.

On this occasion, too, Mrs. Greer performed her terrible introduction: "And this is Roley, the baby of the family. Roley, get up! Say how-do-you-do to Max."

Oh! To hurt her! Was he not "up" already? Did he not know what to say? And he was *not* her beastly baby!

He looked up into Max's face, dropped his eyes at once, and, his cheeks pricking hot, held out a drying hand and said: "How-do-you-do?"

"Hullo! How do you do," replied Max. "I've got a brother, too. How old are you? . . . Eight? . . . So is he, but he's not so tall as you.

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I've got two sisters as well," he added, turning towards Alexia and Janet, adopting an expression of politeness, as much as to convey that, even had it not been the case, he would have been only too happy to invent sisters out of sheer niceness and by way of instituting friendly relations with his host's womenfolk.

Roland felt that Max's greeting to him was a disguised attempt to soften Mrs. Greer's unwitting but stupid insult.

"That's all right; don't you take any notice of her, young feller! You're a nice chap, by the look of you, and I've often dribbled cake on to the carpet meself." This was what Roland understood by Max's cheerful and expansive greeting. How lovely Max was! How ripping! What an awful sport! Roland felt at once that he liked Max very much indeed.

The visitor fitted into the family remarkably well. He submitted to the general discipline with good grace, habitually giving way from his privileged position of visitor to allow, like a gentleman, the girls to have the first share of everything. He softened the children's quarrels by his own good temper; accepted defeat in games as pleasantly as victory, and in every way behaved perfectly.

The end of his first week came, and with it Sunday. On Sunday Max went to church. Alexia cast proud, secret glances at her sister; Janet, a look of secret jubilation at Roland; and Roland shot repeated looks of surreptitious and confused anxiety at Daniel. What would Daniel say now? How

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would Max's Christianity affect Dan's views on theology and ethics? Not that Roland intended to broach the subject; but it seemed possible that Daniel might perceive the delicacy of the situation and volunteer a statement. After all, felt Roland, circumstances alter cases, and it was possible that Daniel had been wrong. For one or the other was presumably, and how could it be Max?

Roland looked across the table at the auburn hair of his new elder brother, his god, his superman. As the family left the table and Max sauntered lankily across the room and sat down in an armchair, Roland followed him with his eyes. In a few moments, when his mother had gone to the kitchen to "give the orders," and the table was cleared, he would go over to him. These things happened, and Roland went over. He stood opposite Max, who was leaning back in the deep armchair; then put a hand on each of Max's sprawling knees. Supporting himself on rigid arms, Roland took his feet off the ground and, his shoulders thus humped comically high, gave himself a gentle swing, smiling dazedly and dumbly into Max's blue eyes.

Roland said nothing. Max stretched out his hands and clasped Roland's wrists, singing cheerfully:

"Húl-lo, húl-lo!
Húl-lo, húl-lo!
Sháll we—pláy draughts,
Rúl-lo, Rúl-lo?"

Roland nodded, and went on swinging. Then he stopped suddenly, slid forward and, leaning against

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Max's body, his face close to Max's lazy lips, said softly: "Do that again."

"Shall I? All right, once more. But then let's play draughts. After that Dan and I are going to play, and you can watch.

"Húl-lo, hól-lo,
Húl-lo, hól-lo!
Wé will—pláy draughts,
Ról-lo-Pó-lo!"

"Now then, come on, Polo."

"No, but . . ." Polo objected, "that wasn't again. I mean, not properly. You didn't hold my wrists. Do it properly." And he pushed Max's knees apart and swung himself between them on to his arms.

"Well, what if I didn't, you young blighter!" retorted Max. "I only did that before because I thought you might fall. That's not what you meant by doing it again. No cheating! Come on, get the board."

"But it was! It *was*!" pleaded Roland with sudden vehemence. "At least," he added with apparent confusion, "I did mean *just* like what you did before, and that was part of it, wasn't it? Oh, do, please, Max, just once more. But properly."

"Oh, buck up, Roland, I want a game with Max!" intervened his brother. "Of course you didn't mean that. He's cheating, Max. The kids always do, if you don't look out."

"I *wasn't* cheating, Dan, so there! I won't hurry up! Why should I? Max said he'd play with me, first, anyhow."

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"Yes, I did. Come on, then, Roley, once more; and after that we'll play."

With hot passion Roland stared at his brother, but Daniel turned off Max's gentle rebuff with a "Right you are, old chap, but do buck up!" and moved away.

"Now!" said Roland; and for the third time he swung upon his arms. Max clasped his wrists and hummed "Hullo, holo, Rullo, Polo" in time to Roland's swings back and forward. Roland swung as far as he could, trying to make each swing last as long as possible, partly to irritate his brother, partly to keep for ever those magic hands upon him.

Then came the game of draughts. Roland could never beat Max, just as he could never beat his brother. But he did not mind losing to Max. Max set the board upon his knees and Roland sat on the footstool with his legs underneath Max's chair.

"I've got two kings now! Look!" exclaimed Roland, peering close into Max's face, and noticing how the hair fell like a bronze and burnished scimitar over the side of Max's forehead.

"Yes, but just you wait," threatened Max good-humouredly.

"Yes, you wait!" repeated Dan sarcastically. He had been looking on and doing his best to spoil the game by uttering Sibylline remarks every time Roland had a difficult move to decide. He had waited doggedly for an opportunity for reprisals. "I bet you don't win, Roland, even if you get three kings, and I bet you'll never do that!"

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"All right, Dan! How do you know? I don't myself." Max tempered the heat of passions once again, defending Roland from their fiercest impact, calming Danny by a sarcasm purposely feeble and joking. The sarcasm kept Danny in countenance, while its tone removed all sting. Dan stood where he was, looking down upon the board, repeating without words, but in his every look and movement, that Roly *would* lose all the same, and serve him right. Roland took longer and longer over each move in order to postpone, not so much the moment of his own defeat, as that of his brother's triumph. In any case, he never did mind losing to Max.

Roland lost his game and Dan had his "I told you so," and sat down on a chair in Roland's place.

"Well, I bet *you* can't beat Max, either!" challenged Roland bitterly.

"I never said I could," said Daniel, with restraint and caution.

"And I never said you did say so!" mocked Roland discontentedly.

"Oh, chuck it, Roley," protested Max persuasively. "How do you know Dan can't beat me? He did the other day after I'd got four kings. Come and sit on my knee. Only you must promise not to interrupt."

"Yes, I promise, truly."

Roland scrambled up and sat on Max's thigh, leaning against his chest, with his legs between Max's. He put one arm around behind Max's back and the other on Max's chest, with his thumb in between his own teeth.

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Roland cuddled back and gazed dreamily at the draughtsboard. It had no interest for him. The small of his back tickled, his ears sang. The skin and muscles where his shoulders ran up into the back of his neck shivered like the withers of a horse. He took his thumb out of his mouth and moved his fist gently up to Max's tie and collar. He rubbed a finger-tip over the collar's edge and touched Max's throat, waiting to see if the boy was ticklish and would laugh, or push his hand away. Roland uncurled another finger and touched with that too, and then another and another. His fingers tingled; "pins and needles" tumbled through the veins of his arm, his little body glowed. A dizzy languor stole over him. He shut his eyes, and, scarcely breathing, his heart throbbing, let his muscles relax and his whole body press against Max's.

The gold-glowing, magic isthmus between fingers and throat remained unsevered. This part of Roland's body, or that, no longer tingled more than the rest. He inhaled an atmosphere as it were of vapourised treacle. With his shut eyes he saw Max's face, large, straight-featured, smooth-haired, blue-eyed, stooping low over his own. Max's lips, straight, pink, slightly parted, the edges cut as with a sickle, the corners drooping in a miracle of laughing handsomeness, were approaching his.

"Nearer, nearer. Oh!" thought Roland. "Eat me! I want you to eat me up. Do, Max darling!"

He was buoyed upon air, flying in voluptuous swoops through a blinding golden haze,

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"For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

The swoops grew fiercer, the light more gilded and more dazzling; a roar beat at his temples.

Then a detonation in his ear, an earthquake, and the spearhead of a plough scoring his cheek—the rough tweed of Max's coat-sleeve—roused him from his stupor. He had slipped to the ground between Max's knees, and he looked at his brother to try to understand what was happening.

"Didn't!" Dan was saying loudly.

"Dan, you did! Leave that king alone."

"I won't!" shouted back Danny. "I *said* I hadn't settled my move. Take your hand off the board!" And he took hold of Max's wrist.

"Look here, Dan . . ."

"Oh, Dan, shut up making such a row, do!" put in Roland, with rash petulance.

To his four lives a fifth had been suddenly added, or seemed about to be—conflict between two male leaderships. But this was such a short life that it hardly counted. After all, four were enough for anybody, and most people would have been happy to halve those and double the number of deaths at their disposal.

"Shut up, you idiot! You know nothing about it! You weren't even looking!" snorted Dan.

Maddened by the terrible interruption of his ecstasy, madly emboldened by the feeling of his god behind him for support, Roland defied his brother foolhardily and openly for the first time within the memory of either.

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"I was!" he lied deliberately, eager almost to provoke a quarrel.

"You weren't, you liar!" shouted Dan again.

"I was! Liar yourself!" plunged Roland, and lifted his outstretched fingers to his nose. Then he moved his hand forward, to put it on the same draughtsman that Max was still guarding, in order voluntarily to show Max and his brother on which side he was throwing in his lot, and how far he was prepared to go.

Too old by comparison to plead "Two against one is not fair," but infuriated by the advantage which his lieutenant was seizing to desert him overtly, though on disguised grounds, Daniel, who was galled, too, that his own friend should witness, if not be the cause of, his betrayal, suddenly leaned forward and pushed Roland roughly aside. Roland flinched, parried in fright an imaginary blow, and hit back. At this his brother lost his temper altogether, and now slapped Roland soundly on the cheek.

"No, that's a rotten trick!" said Max. "He's much smaller than you are. Leave him alone!" And he, too, leaned forward as though to guard Roland with his arm.

But by now poor Danny was thoroughly nervous. He expected immediately to forfeit public opinion for his attack on his brother, and, thinking in his turn that Max was about to champion the cause of the weak and the oppressed with no uncertain force, made swiftly as though to hit him back. Max saw the threat though he misunderstood the motive, and, still shielding Roland with his left arm, he

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brought the other hand flat against Dan's ear. The draughtsboard was upset, the black and yellow wooden discs rolled away in all directions, and the two antagonists sat glowering at each other, their reddened faces only a few inches apart.

Max was older and taller than Dan, but of a lighter build. Nevertheless, brought up in a fine "English gentleman's" home, he was absolutely ready to fight, should it be needed, in a cause which his budding if simple sense of honour had impelled him to adopt.

Temperamentally, Dan was averse to physical violence, and was too cynically inclined, albeit he could not have formulated his philosophy, to want to fight physically for the sake of honour, or for that matter, much else. To fight physically seemed stupid. It must always hurt; and there were far better ways generally of getting what one wanted. He knew too that he would be blamed if, or rather when, his mother found out. He was the host. How could he be so ungentlemanly as to be rude to his guest? If his father had been there . . . et cetera, et cetera. He knew it all by heart. The same false position, the same half-truths, the same damned tricks, as when he was reproached for hitting one of his sisters because she was a girl.

He realised, and in time, that Max was too nice and too genuinely pacific to taunt him, if he cooled, with being too much afraid to fight. The fear indeed of that taunt was the most potent factor impelling him to fight, next to the pugnacious impulses themselves which had been roused.

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At moments like this he hated his younger brother, who appeared to him not a companion but a traitor. Moments exactly like this had never occurred, and those remotely like but rarely. To be dethroned before his subjects, or at least his subject, or disowned by his friend, was what Daniel had to choose. If he fought, he must, he knew, lose his friend's esteem; yet he could only keep it by losing Roland's. But it was not exactly esteem which Roland had given him so much as unquestioning, extravagant fidelity.

Perhaps because Daniel was partly aware that such strong emotional dominance as his could not be permanently broken by a scene like this, he decided to control himself. Perhaps mental processes far less mature than this in truth activated him; but a weighing up of some description was assuredly performed.

"All right, sorry!" he mumbled, and stooped to pick up the draughtsmen. "Anyway, Roland shouldn't interfere. Get out, Roland."

"You did it on purpose just as much, Dan, and anyway . . ."

"Oh, Roley, will you be quiet and not make things worse!" Alexia intervened for the first time. She had been standing in scared expectancy behind the sofa in the far corner. "You're a little plague. Leave Max and Dan alone!"

Poor La was as nervous as a wild horse. Her mottoes were "Sufficient unto the day" and "Peace at any Price." She cared neither for display of logic nor plans of enterprise or power. She longed

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only for an uneventful, placid, and maybe orphaned existence, with the support of the Christian Church on the one hand, and affection from and adoration for governesses and school-mistresses on the other. Daniel in a temper was nasty, her mother nastier, and the two in conflict, which was what she foresaw in this case, more horrible than a nightmare.

The tension subsided; the draughtsboard was restored to Max's knees; and the two elder boys set themselves with laudable good nature to begin their game afresh. Alexia came out from behind her sofa and became absorbed once more in *The Story of Joan of Arc*.

As he helped to pick up the draughtsmen and set on its feet a fallen chair, Roland muttered in the direction of Dan in a voice full of meaning, "Well, anyhow, Max goes to Church." But the bait was ignored, so Roland gave up angling in troubled waters and crouched, docilely dumb, beside the draughtsboard.

Everything appeared as it was ten minutes earlier. But it was not.

An unforeseen and unpremeditated situation had brought suddenly to the surface what had till that moment been latent elements in the relations of the two brothers. All Roland's bitter resentment, all the silently endured tortures of self-violation which had been his, and which had culminated in his battle with Janet over the Christianity dispute, now surged into his consciousness. His passion filled him; forceps gripped and twisted his throat; tears swung along his lower lids and blurred his

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vision. He trembled, propped his head between his fists, and looked hard at the floor.

"Daniel, the beast! I hate him! I hate him! I *hate* him! Why should I always do what he says? If I don't he's horrid to me or won't play. He *always* wants everything his way. Why shouldn't I have mine sometimes? Oh! how I hate him!" And the pincers pressed at his throat harder still. He was unhappy, hating Daniel, unhappy obeying him, unhappy violating himself, unhappy struggling to be free. He was miserable and felt lifeless when deprived of the sun of Dan's smile; his blood ebbed away with his life, and he swooned at the resolve to defy his master in open revolt.

Why could not his brother give him love without exacting such a toll? What was this toll? An unconscious power to compel abject subjection by the shadow of a frown, by the merest touchiness, or reaction of displeasure. Yet, if Roland so needed love that he dared not wait to bargain where it was concerned, how was it that Dan dared? For Roland realised that Dan did need love—anyway Roland's love. But in that case Roland surely might adopt Dan's tactics when in need of them. Mentally, if not outwardly, Roland registered a wan smile, like that of a seasick man to whom the steward has offered a joke about salt pork.

Roland was faced with the knowledge of his own enslavement to his brother, and of his inability to end it. Were his love for Dan to lead him to the Pit, then he must go. But he knew now, with a fresh certainty, that, whatever might be a true

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account of his emotions for his brother, the catalogue would be incomplete without hate. He hated Dan; he hated him!

Roland trembled again, physically overcome by his proximity to his brother; and shifted a little on his stool.

Yet if he hated Daniel and parted from him, what would Roland's position become in the family? Dan was the bulwark against their mother, his own particular bulwark against Janet. If he deserted Dan, he would have to fight his own battles, stand on his own feet, stand by himself.

Again nausea stirred his gorge.

How could he fight his mother unaided, even perhaps, opposed by worse odds, when she was raving, "in a bate"? But if he gave up his allegiance to Danny, perhaps one of the provocations to his mother would disappear, and the battles with her become fewer? Could his mother, even, protect him from Daniel? Roland did not know; he did not think so.

Terrible cleft! Must he then choose between the one and the other? Between the frenzies of his mother, "not angry, only grieved," and the steel pressure of his brother, forcing him coldly to his fate? He could not choose. He must. It was impossible to choose. He must.

He must, he must, he *must*. The word nearly lost its meaning through repetition, and he began to grow light-headed. "Must, must, must. How funny it sounds! Say it again: m-mussst. It's like musty."

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"Crusty, dusty, busty, trusty." But stop! He did know what it meant, and he had still to choose: "Mother or Daniel? Mummy or Danny?"

Roland was less conscious of his need for his mother's love than for Daniel's. The first was different, more in his background, less actively co-operative. But he did need it, and he felt the same sort of consternation, if to a lesser degree, at the thought of being cast out into a desolation, inaccessible to her, as he did at the thought of being abandoned by his brother.

Immovable object and irresistible force, indeed! Which was which, his mother or his brother? Little he knew, or cared! They were both rocks upon which he might throw himself for soft mercy in vain; against which, if he hurled himself in fight, it must only be to his destruction.

If only Max were his brother, too! But Max was not.

Roland's elbow slipped from his knee. He stretched out his hand to save himself, tilted sideways and fell. His head shaved the corner of Dan's chair, but missed it; he fell to the floor unhurt.

He crossed his forearms, banged his forehead on to his wrists, and burst into passionate tears. He cried. He cried.

"There, there, Roley, where did it get you?"

Fingers pressed his ribs, arms were round his sides, and Max's voice caressed close to his cheek.

But Roland only shook his head. He cried.

"Never mind, old chap. There, that'll make it better. It was his head, I think," and Max's voice

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was followed by his fingers, rubbing gently through Roland's hair.

But Roland shook his head. He cried.

"What's the matter, Roley? What is it, old chap?"

Another voice, Daniel's, soft, apologetic, pleading for a truce. The king's clemency, the royal love, peace, was descending at last. But for always? Was the problem solved?

Roland shook his head. He cried.

PART II

TO THE DARK TOWER

I

A YOUTH leaned out of the window in a cab as it was slackening its pace, and said in a gentle voice to an old man panting along just outside:

“You are not wanted, thank you; will you please go away.”

Since the runner continued to follow without taking any notice of this request, the youth, who looked about eighteen years old, put his head out and repeated it.

Roland Greer put one hand on his companion's knee, but withdrew it swiftly and rested both hands on the edge of the window, leaning forward to give his words the necessary sternness, and to see better through the darkness whether the wretched workless creature was giving up his pursuit. Roland was not performing this kindly act by inclination, but because he was frightened of a woman, who was sitting next to him. She was his mother.

She never would let beggars off the street help to carry luggage. But there was no one else to do it now, so Roland had to. Not that he minded, but his mother made such a fuss about his not straining himself, though he knew she felt relief over the economy. Besides, with the railway limitation on the weight of luggage and with only two of them travelling, there was not much. And,

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anyway, he reflected with mixed, grim satisfaction, this was the last time for some months, some years to come. "Perhaps ever," he thought dramatically. "Then she'll be glad I joined the Army."

But what a tortuous enlistment his would have been! How he was dreading it! How he had dreaded announcing he had changed his mind and was not a "conscientious objector" any longer! He had dreaded that more than his original declaration that he was. He had dreaded both decisions. He had funk'd fighting and funk'd going to prison. Apparently, like others, he funk'd fighting less. But the difference was so slight he could hardly measure it, and what exactly had pulled him over he hardly knew. The persuasiveness of that dear old Swiss, the foreign language master, he supposed, who had argued with him dispassionately, and, though himself a pacifist, advised him to fight because "eet ees naw yoosee bitting yourr head aggainst a breekwoll."

Certainly he was not yielding to the rear attacks of his mother's beastly friends, who wrote to him, egged on by her, that he was very young and ought to think very carefully before taking such a step, and didn't he care the least bit that he was making his mother so ill? Certainly it was not on account of the elephantine efforts at persuasion and the sublime patriotism of poor dear Alexia, who was "*poz.* that the War must be over at the *latest* by Christmas. Everybody 'in the know' thinks the same." Certainly it was not on account of his mother's dirty social cowardice, or her fits of the

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vapours. She could not teach Roland anything about shamming dead. He had not endured compulsory games for four years to no purpose. And her ethical arguments hardly rang very true to Roland's ears, which could still hear echoes from not four years ago, when the English had been filthy liars, thieves, cheats, brutes, common, unable to cook, lazy, unenterprising and stupid, and when the French alone had been the inheritors of the earth. No; "She" did not care about his moral struggles; all she wanted was to be on the right side.

Roland had been puzzled by his mother's reaction to the War. She wobbled like a stalling aeroplane, until she finally landed, safe, though only just, within bounds. Her love for Roland, her fears that he might be killed, appeared not to enter into her calculations; yet Roland was positive that they did, and that she did not really exclude them, because swept away by patriotism.

When he rhetorically accused his mother of wanting to see him killed in the trenches, he knew that he was hurting her, taking caddish advantage of her poor powers of dialectics, and that he himself did not believe it for one moment. It was with uneasy heart that, seated facing her in his cubicle his last term at school, he had wielded this argument—put into his hands by Daniel, his ally to the last ditch in his stand for conscience; and only with unhappy nervousness, and freshly primed by his bereaved and pathetic little housemaster, had Roland's mother parried.

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Roland was too young to distinguish between his own genuine, if youthful, intellectual judgment and the emotional forces which were pulling him this way and that without any reference to his "conscience." So he mixed true arguments with false, and when swept by a feeling of guilt ascribed it mistakenly to the judgments he had formed, and then listed heavily on to the opposite side.

Certainly his mother had behaved to him abominably, whether she was fond of him or not; and he tried to feel unforgiving. During one period he refused to write or speak to her and in term-time sent only a weekly postcard home saying: "I am quite well. R. G." Daniel, who made Roland unhappy by out-Heroding him so, had advised this, and, on Roland's behalf, so he said, broke off all relations with their mother, took a flat of his own and refused to see or communicate with her ever again. He kept to this for a long time, but admitted that her coercion of Roland over joining the Army was only the occasion for which he had been waiting. He hated his mother with a relentless ferocity and a venom which horrified Roland, on whom was imposed the strain of following, panting, in his brother's footsteps, and of dragging himself away from his mother's natural, friendly overtures with a borrowed harshness for armour-plating round his softer heart.

Secretly, if he was left alone with her—and he was, now that his brother and sisters had carried out their threats and left her—, Roland got along quite well with his mother. They avoided controversial

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matters for the most part, and had plenty in common to last them for a short holiday—music, the country, travel books, and gardening. But Roland never let his brother know, and always pretended that the holidays had been “absolute hell,” embroidering his accounts and convincing himself by cruel exaggerations and beastly jokes, which hurt him.

What a dance Dan had led him! It was easy enough for Dan, totally exempt, and of independent means. Besides, he was twenty-three, and legally of age. Roland never doubted the passionate sincerity of Dan’s uncompromising pacifism, but he did wonder, though he never asked, what his brother would have done if arthritis had not saved him. Dan seemed never to notice that Roland sometimes lagged a little behind in his “conscientious” ardour; and Roland found himself agreeing, with a horrible enthusiasm whose disingenuousness made him shift uneasily in his intellectual position, with Dan’s plans for pacific propaganda and his own conscientious martyrdom.

It was all very well, but, though they were Daniel’s plans, Roland was to go to prison—“only for a week or so, and then they let you out quietly and you do ‘work of National importance’! . . .”

Roland felt nearly as great scepticism at Dan’s discounted “week or so” as at Alexia’s “Christmas.” Only, he might pour scorn on Alexia’s rudimentary subterfuge and not on Dan’s. True (and Roland understood and felt this to be true with complete conviction) Daniel’s only aims were to forward the cause of international pacifism, and, hardly less, to

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save his brother from the trenches. Roland never questioned his brother's motives, his love, or his disinterested concern. Dan could so easily have concealed his views behind his military exemption, and masqueraded as a frustrated volunteer. But he scorned to do so, and willingly accepted the risk of alienating his friends—Armour, of Oxford days, of whom he saw much, Max Fairley, of school days, of whom he saw far less, Parker, Moberley, and a dozen more.

It was his methods which were so trying, on account of the uncompromising courage and willingness to stand alone, for which they called.

Roland felt sometimes that it was no good—he had not Dan's spirit to carry through his ideas. But then again, Dan loved him so, that neither had Roland the spirit to tell him. Roland just set his teeth and said, "Not this time." Thus Daniel unwittingly got himself served by a flagging follower; and it was only when Roland felt stretched to breaking-point—beyond which the tension and conflict in his mind would, it seemed, be more awful than the sternest disapproval of his brother, or the completest withdrawal of his love, and than bearing every torture which the trenches had yet produced—that Roland screwed himself to the pitch of following his uppermost inclination.

So, unnerved, quaking with fear, Roland wrote to his brother of his decision to join the Army, after all. When Dan's reply came, kind, gentle, extraordinarily sympathetic, couched in humorous phrases which were the vehicle (humour always was between

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them, for some reason which neither ever understood) of his tenderest affection, Roland collapsed weakly into tears, laughed, and danced. He might just have received permission to go on a picnic.

The absolute readiness of his brother to stop without a word, turn round, and follow Roland's lead, with never a murmur of his wasted pains, his worry, or his quarrels with other people for his sake, reduced Roland to a state of blind, abject adoration of his brother, and bound him more closely to Dan than ever before.

"I would only beg that you avoid getting killed," Dan wrote in studied under-statement, as was his invariable habit when deeply moved. "I should, and Janny, too, I think, simply feel lamed without you afterwards. I should just feel a great intellectual loneliness."

"Just a great intellectual loneliness," Roland repeated proudly to an intimate friend or two when explaining to them the unique relations between his brother and him. He wondered whether they did not pity him for having only such a cold intimacy, and realised that he might, with a show of reason, pose as being hurt by such inadequate, unemotional, so-called friendship; though he did not feel hurt, but only proud.

Having made up his mind about the Army, Roland did not worry himself with morbid fears over the future. The relaxation of the tension brought a relief which he could describe to nobody. The Army would be more novel and could hardly be more disillusioning than a public school. In

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one of those spiritual barracks, where little boys are taught to become beasts, boors, and bigots, where their paid mentors are, responsibly and irresponsibly, liable to assume resemblance with tormentors, Roland had served four years. The pogroms against collective Jewry (where, if you subscribed more than others to a Charity, you were kicked for swanking, "as if you were a damned millionaire," and, if you subscribed less, you were kicked for shamming "broke," "just like a bloody Jew") had given Roland at least a preparation for the rude life he was about to enter, though his device for escaping from mob horse-play through achieving the asylum of prefectdom by one's brains, was likely to mislead him as to similar chances in the Army.

Still, the Army was notoriously brutal, stupid, cruel. He bore it no resentment such as one felt for the obscene, putrid death-machine masquerading as a technical institution for the training of the young of human beings. You could not desert from the Army; it had been only his fiery home which had prevented him jumping out of his frying-pan of a public school. No; for the present, at any rate, Roland felt he had very little to lose but his chains.

And now his mother and he were returning from his last civilian holiday; in two days he would be a national slave, and his mother, his brother, his two titans, his two masters, would be as powerless to control his life, or save it, as he.

She seemed to realise what was passing in his

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mind and to feel the challenge to exercise her dominion over him to the end. Her distress at losing him was crushed under her compulsion to exact the submission and respect of early days and to conceal the reflected indignity which she felt at his joining the ranks and not as an officer. But he had been obdurate in his refusal to seek a commission; it had been a last token of acknowledgment and farewell to his conscientious objection.

Their very situation—returning home in a vehicle from a holiday—induced in Roland some of the terror which he had as a child so often suffered in the scenes that would arise at these times.

The feeling that now they were both veritably making history, that is, doing something which they had never done before and would never do again—albeit only family history—added to Roland's nervousness, frayed his temper and his mother's.

"Roland, don't be silly; you'll only strain yourself, trying to lift that box; give me the other handle," she commanded, making stupid, irritating efforts to help. He had lifted everything already into the hall, and was moving a trunk into the adjoining dining-room, where it could be unpacked later at their leisure.

"Oh, it's all right. I can manage."

"*Roland!* Do what I tell you now . . ." and again she made a grab at the box handle, biting her lower lip theatrically lest Roland should overlook the heroic endurance for her child's sake.

How many seconds longer would he be able to restrain himself from taunting her with her re-

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fusal of the old unemployed's help? Cheap, he knew, but then so were her idiotic attempts at martyrdom.

Unimpeded by her stupid antics, he could have had the trunk upstairs by now; and, saved the waste of breath on countering arguments *ad hominem*, in *circulo*, and of every other fallacious variety, so badly needed for moving the precious luggage, he would have been calmer, less near the limit of his self-control.

But Myra was as fast bound to the crotchets of her personality as was her son both to his own and hers, and he already saw that her evil genius would not be satisfied till it had forced events, mere trifles though they were, to serve its purpose, and shape themselves, if not bring ease, to the cravings of his mother's nature.

"Why will you insist on martyring yourself, you stupid boy? There's no need to!"

"*Me* martyrise myself? *Me*? I like that! What do you think it is *you're* doing?" Roland swung the lead weight of his resentment in his mother's face.

"Ro-land!" she gasped, prettily shocked, in a flash ready for her rôle. "Really, if . . ."

"Oh, good Lord, I can't stand a scene now, Mother. For God's sake, dry up. It's bad enough as it is, surely, without . . ."

"I only meant to be a help, Roley. Really, I do think . . ."

"Oh, well, I'm sorry; but do let's get this job over . . ."

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"My dear, you know I only want to help you. If Father were here now . . ."

"I'm going to bed. Good night." Roland burst, a film only of control between him and matricide, and he dashed without further ado towards the door.

There was no time to lose; she must play the card this instant for what it was worth. Myra dropped her half-open dressing-bag, scuttled across the room to intercept Roland before he should reach the door, and flung out her arms theatrically to embrace him.

But, even theatrically, the movement was ill-judged. One hand reached his shoulder, the other not, and in her haste she caught her foot against the trunk, tripped, and fell forwards her full length on the floor.

Unable to conceal his revulsion, Roland swerved perceptibly away, and, as his mother's half-frightened, histrionic scream smote unharmoniously upon his ears, he marched out of the door and fled trembling to his room.

II

WHILE Roland was in the Army, Daniel became engaged, against all his principles, to Eileen Mayor. Naturally he and Myra succeeded in quarrelling about it.

In common decency he might have brought the news first to his own mother; in common decency at least she might have trusted the word of her own son. How could he be so cruel as to sneer at her to his future wife? Why did she exceed all bounds by slandering him to his future wife's people?

Friends of both generations intervened and took sides; interviews innumerable were arranged and broke down; and a whirlpool of letters, opened, intercepted, and unread, swirled round and round the two families.

It was a handicap hearing only of the row in letters, and Roland felt it was a little unfair to drag him into it. Moreover, having heard his mother's side first, he thought she was right. He compromised painfully by avoiding having to join actively in the quarrel, but acknowledging, bit by bit, that Dan obviously had been in the right from the first. It served Myra right if Dan did refuse to go to see her. Yet Roland was puzzled that a girl who was presumably accessible emotionally, could apparently take part with such light-hearted amusement in this horrible affair.

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Not that he did not like her.

"In fact, I could almost marry her myself," he swaggered when his mother asked him timidly if she was nice, kind, beautiful; and he praised his future sister-in-law to the skies, feeling somehow that his mother would be consoled, and on the balance prefer that to the bitter ravages of goaded malice.

Roland obtained leave for Dan's wedding, but concealed the fact from his mother, for she expected him to spend every leave at home with her. When he met Dan and Janet he expatiated cynically upon the comforts of civilian life obtainable at home, but he also enjoyed the time spent with his mother, who laid herself out to please him and keep the brief days unspoiled. Only, his return was such an ordeal. It was bad enough, in any case, to go back to that life; but when she clung round his neck as though he were starting for the Front that very instant, whereas there was not the faintest prospect, he began to hate her, and avoid her tearful, heroic martyr's face, and wish he had never come.

After Dan's marriage this state of affairs was changed—largely through Roland himself, for he always followed his escape from his mother's intolerable farewells with lurid tirades against her, written to his brother and his sister-in-law.

"Funny lad," Dan said as he finished reading one of these. "Why will he always go home for his leaves if it's dreary for him? He practically says here he has to pay for his pampering by listening to sob-stuff till he wants to kill her!"

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"Yes, poor darling, it must be pretty awful for him spending a whole week-end leave alone with that dreadful woman," Eileen agreed. True, she had never met her mother-in-law, but could Eileen not already judge what sort of a person was this who had provoked and been alone to blame for the dreadful quarrels and impossible scenes over Dan's engagement?

"The worst of it is, it may only make things more difficult for him if we offer to have him," Dan worried.

"Well, why not make a compromise? Ask him here once, then he can tell his mother he'll go to her the next leave. She can't possibly object to that!" suggested Eileen. She liked her brother-in-law and wanted to be kind to him, even if two were company and three none.

So they made Roland promise, and he was delighted. But when the time drew near for him to tell his mother—she had known his next leave's date long before Dan's and Eileen's invitation—his heart began to fail him.

Then his mother came down to see him for the day, and there he stood, face to face with telling her or lying. He dared do neither. He hated her as her eyes looked appealingly into his and she began to cry. He hated Dan for having persuaded him to agree to the accursed plan—for having ever suggested it.

"Oh! And I had so looked forward to your next leave, Roley! I was counting the days already! Oh, Roley! Daniel has got Eileen and I've got

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nobody. I'm all alone! And I shan't know when I may see you again . . ."

It was that last sentence which decided him. She was play-acting as she said it, brutally letting him see that she was prepared already to make capital out of the chance of his going to the Front, and to extract pity whenever possible. Till she spoke that sentence he was hers. He wanted to drop his idiotic little Army cane and fling his arms round her neck, there in front of the military police pacing the platform, and with his mother leaning out of the carriage window touching his fingers with her cold hand. She wore a veil, and her breath was condensing on it in drops, like the dew on a spider's web, and her tears were dribbling down and mixing with them; he had felt the minute hexagonal pattern impress itself on his lips as she kissed him.

"Mother! Mother darling! Don't cry! I'll spend every leave with you I ever get! Don't cry! I promise. I promise! I'll never go near those brutes again. Please stop crying. Please!"

But she spoke that sentence. Clouds dulled his eyes. She was hateful. His heart turned to stone as he stood waiting for the train to start, and he pulled his hand, without trying to be gentle, away from hers just as he felt her grasp tightening to hold him.

"I'm sorry, but I don't see why I shouldn't spend my leaves where I like. I've spent all my others with you. Good-bye."

The train had begun to move before he finished.

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"Oh, Roley! . . . All right."

His mother's voice, calling to him to save her from cruel enemies as they dragged her to the torture, sounded helpless, pitiable, childish. "All right" sounded like "All over."

He saw his mother's mobile face, which had been expressing to the uttermost limit of its subtle powers every variation she knew in the gamut of maternal sensibility, and compressing an agony of remorse and loneliness into the last fraction of a second which remained to her, suddenly relax, give up the game, become hopeless, grey. Her lids fluttered down, her lovely hands slid away from the window, and she sat back among men and women who did not know her and never would.

Yet in the instant of her most acute unhappiness she retained a part of herself, immune from sorrow, reserved for self-pity. It was that which lost her Roland. It was that which had lost her and alienated all her children, one after the other.

In that last flash she exposed as it were the bent edges of a long photographic film, folded like a concertina. If only somehow the entire picture could be taken, in however rough an outline, then her son could, by extending the concertina at his leisure afterwards, be subjected to the influence of the whole pathetic spectacle. But her intention, terribly subtle though it was, had been clear at the very moment the concertina-photograph was taken, and she saw her son take the compressed film between his finger and thumb and drop it under the passing wheels without a word.

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Roland walked back to his quarters with a heavy heart. Such battles, such victories if you liked, cost him dear. Dan did not seem to realise how dear, and Roland dared not say.

He spent his leave with his brother and sister-in-law, but he was fitfully preoccupied.

As a soldier Roland had little to worry about. The prospect of the Front never came very close, owing to the technical and instructional work which his education enabled him to do, and which made it more important to keep him where he was. The Armistice, too, though he did not know it, was not many months away.

This removal of the control of his own life lifted an enormous spiritual burden from him. If the Female and the Male chose now to fight, their hostile impacts could not be transmitted through him as buffer. He was suspended above in a cage and could watch, or ignore, their collisions, unperturbed. To be sure, if the control was released, as during a leave, he redescended into his old position, and the protagonists closed in upon him like hounds. But those were exceptions.

Knowing he could not be called on to fulfil either set of pledges, he served both God and Mammon. He lavished sympathy on his mother for her deprivation of relations with Dan's wife, extolled the virtues and fascination of the French language, and proved voracious for chit-chat on the trials of house-keeping.

At the same time, like a baker juggling patterns with swooping ropes of dough, he spun long and

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tortuous threads of diatribe against the She-Fiend who had tried to ruin Dan's marriage, and who was now trying to injure his work in every dark way possible.

Roland pleaded again and again to be allowed to help Dan in some way; he applauded with enthusiasm Dan's work.

Dan was organising an office for disseminating on an international scale news about the political conditions and economic effects of the war in nearly every important country in the world. For impassioned but unreasoned pacifism he had little use; he wanted to influence people by showing them facts, revealing what was happening, had happened, and would continue to happen, now and always, as a result of war. The International Bureau for Economic Research, or "Tiber," was the title he gave to his creation, which he nourished and cherished with passionate effort. Roland's facility for foreign languages was invaluable for translations, and while the Bureau was still in its infancy Dan drew on this source of help, which was volunteered with eagerness and given with efficiency. It gave Roland some connection with intellectual life to which to cling during his primitive existence "by numbers." Daniel never forgot his brother's help, and it strengthened their affection in many ways.

But Roland was more fond than wise; it was nothing, nothing to what he would like to do if he were free.

When ruminating on what he should adopt as

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his subject at the University, and, latterly, as a career, Roland felt himself leap in vital response only to the word "music." Other things interested him in a cold way, but he felt passionate only about that one thing. Still, he admitted that it offered a doubtful livelihood, whereas he would be a rash fool to neglect his highly marketable linguistic powers. He was proud of these, yet ashamed too, for he had seen—all the children had seen—so often their francomaniac mother put her facility for languages to childish, repulsively boastful, almost vulgar use. In their mother's presence the children talked French or German seldom, reluctantly, with as bad an English accent as their fear of her and their skilled craftsmen's pride would allow.

"Il faut—ouvrir—la—bou-che et parler très distinctement," their mother used to gargle at them with disgusting, elastic lips.

They would blush with embarrassment, laugh at the gargling r's, and gobble their words as thickly as they knew how. But when they were alone, pride came uppermost, and they trilled, and gargled, and neighed through their noses like any little Froggy.

To adapt languages to a career then seemed to Roland quite a good second best and, knowing that in any case he could not be taken at his word while he was a prisoner, which might be for a long time yet, in spite of La's and Mr. Bottomley's "by Christmas," he could not resist showing his brother how much he loved him by these unqualified if irresponsible assurances of help.

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Direct references to their love for each other came so hard to them that indirect references were often overworked.

But there was more to the motivation. Roland was always so anxious (and not only proud) to be found in alliance with his elder brother, so anxious to please him, that he was for ever straining to forestall Dan's every thought, every wish, every opinion, and to ensure his perpetual approval. Thus, Roland was inclined, without noticing, to behave like a court fool, who is the most favoured and privileged of all subjects, but who is bound to make the diversion and the well-being of his master his unremitting task. Roland's attitude, his relationship to Dan, became a little obvious; their relations smiled, their mother frowned, Dan himself did not notice, nor, or hardly, did Roland. They simply loved each other very much indeed. Naturally—everybody knew—that took the form of helping each other as much as they could. Was it not their mother's own pet sentiment and her reason for slaving away for their sakes and enduring endless weariness and hardship?

Daniel, who was a man while his brother, even though a soldier, was still a youth, took Childe Roland at his word. If Roley really meant what he said, why not, when he went up to Oxford, read history, economics, and politics, which, with his knowledge of languages, would be an invaluable help, and join Daniel in the Bureau?

Roland was taken somewhat aback. He could not reply, "But I didn't mean it," although that would

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have been as true as any answer. He had not meant to be taken literally; it had just been a way of saying, "I love you," and no more. And if he backed out of his promise—so gushingly made and quite unsolicited—his brother would never trust in him again, nor hold his love as worth a straw. To set music against Dan's proposal as a serious rival, Roland knew would be regarded as a joke. The arts were valuable, of course, but the Bureau, Research, Science—these were the things of real importance, with which they might influence the history of the world.

"I'm not really a Liberal at heart," Dan confided; "I would like to dragoon people."

Roland's heart hardened imperceptibly; the sentence was rushed at, grabbed by his mind, as an entangled fly is by a spider, and enveloped, pinioned, and dragged away to the storeroom of his memory, to be brought out again to nourish hate whenever that monster might demand it.

To understand first, and next to influence, the world, those were the most important things one could choose. Nevertheless they were not Roland's choice. But they were Daniel's; and he fixed his eyes on his goal with a passionate, scarcely human intensity. To that goal he would have sacrificed anything.

"Even Eileen, perhaps," thought Roland secretly, "and even me. Yes, certainly me," he added with hasty modesty. "Even," his thoughts concluded, "even himself." Less positive this, but a necessary provision, since to picture Dan as omitting himself

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after those others would be to paint him too deep a dye.

But Roland had chosen music, and nothing could really alter it. There it was. Duty, however, could displace the object of his free choice, and duty must. So, suppressing his misgivings, suppressing the anxiety with which his thoughts flew in the direction of their mother when the time should come to inform her, feeling vaguely—whether logic bore the feeling out or not—that his desertion from conscientious objection imposed this sacrifice for Dan's sake upon him with double reason, Roland assented to his brother's proposal and fell in with his plans.

But even now Roland could not let things be. Having assented, it was imperative to assent with good grace, and he carried this so far as to convince Dan before long that, far from having any reluctance, he had only been waiting to be asked. Not once, but over and over again, Roland misled, and was to mislead, Daniel in this way; and when an exposure of Roland's true feelings became inevitable, Daniel blamed Roland and Roland blamed Daniel.

III

WHEN Roland, discharged from the Army, did go up to Oxford, it was to study, not music, as he had pined to do, not modern languages as his mother had advised (and been advised) that he should do, but economics and politics, which neither of them wanted. Roland had found his brother's intellectual arguments intellectually unanswerable—his mother's intervention had not been asked, and her bluff of threatening not to give Roland an allowance had been called without great difficulty. But she paid him out.

She did it by trying to persuade him to allow her to be interested in his work, his thoughts, his doings. Some semblance was retained of normal friendly intercourse, but she was clumsy in her tactics, and both stupid and openly malicious in her intellectual gambits.

"Economics: now do explain to me exactly what it means, dear. Bimetallism, isn't it? Don't you see, Roley, I want to learn. I used to share Daddy's work with him. Now I've only you left. It's only natural, isn't it, that I should want to share in his son's life? And he was so proud of you!"

Ah, why wasn't *he* with her now! Her son repulsed her, the baby David had held in his dying

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arms. His child did not know what he was doing. It was that cruel, hard man's fault—Daniel's. He influenced Roland like clay.

If only she could keep Roland! Alexia had left her, goaded away by her mad brother Daniel. Really, he must be nearly mad—have fixed ideas. What had Myra ever done that was not intended for his good? Daniel had left her in brutal, obsessed enmity. He had brought Janet up to fever pitch to get her away, and soon he would have torn away Myra's last.

Was she to sit alone, eat alone, walk alone, without husband, without children, with only a home's travesty, for the rest of her days, to satisfy the passion of an obsessed man? Never! She would summon all the courage, all the patience, and, if need be, all the guile that she possessed, to keep her youngest, to keep his love. For she knew that he loved her though he might not know how much himself. Janet did perhaps, and Alexia. And deep, deep within his bitter self, even Daniel. She knew it, saw it through his hate and her own, but knew he would never see it, so that for her he was lost. Yet Roland felt affection sometimes when they were alone together, at a concert, travelling, on a jaunt. Give him up? See him embittered, made a clever, unhappy, scientific fool, his musical talent neglected and allowed to wither, by that tyrannical, heartless, incomprehensible bully? Never!

And this "Economics"! She knew, she was positive, Roland had taken it at Oxford only because

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of Daniel and that so-called International Office of his. Why wouldn't Roland take music or Modern Languages as she and her brother Freddie had advised—something Roley had a talent for? Nor would he ever discuss Economics with her. Was that because it was Daniel's subject, and because he knew it to be not really of his seeking?

At that she became harder, and, picking up the desultory conversation, accepted Roland's rebuff at her attempt to be interested, and gave the talk a parental, nasty tone.

"What does it lead to? After all, though you may not realise it, you'll have to do something to earn your living when you leave the University. You say you don't want to go into the Diplomatic. Very well, you needn't. Neither your father nor I ever wished you, or any boy of ours, to do that just because it was your father's profession, unless you liked it.

"But," she added, with a rush of venom, and clenched teeth—it had always been a weakness with her that she could never resist taking unfair advantage of an adversary, nor an opportunity for a jeer, however cheap—, "you'll have to do something, my friend. Or did you expect me to go on giving you your allowance indefinitely?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, then, what do you propose to do, may I ask? What sort of work do you expect to get after taking a degree in Economics? Really, Roland! You needn't look offended just because I ask to what use you propose to put the education

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I've given you! I'm your mother, and I'm entitled to know, I suppose! Before you go on wasting any more money, I want to know: what does Economics lead to?"

So they had arrived at the same point by the same road as they always did. The same gradations from cajolery to taunts. How he hated her! How did he know "what it led to"? It did not "lead to" anything unless The International Bureau of Economic Research, and he could hardly tell her that. It was a mind training, and some job would always come along. It was far better than perfecting oneself in some elegant jugglery like French and German. It was the providing of an intellectual weapon, an equipment which would enable one to tackle anything among a wide variety of things later on.

Daniel had expounded it all with perfectly convincing lucidity. It was a superb mental discipline; far better than specialising—that was hopelessly ineffectual as a mind-training. And it would make one so objective, too. But if he explained all that, she would not appreciate it, and she would be sure to say Daniel had influenced him, or something hopeless like that.

Roland positively dreaded this question of his mother's, "What does it lead to?" and only less so than the other about what did he mean to do after leaving Oxford. He dared not answer truthfully to either. His true answer to both was, "I don't know."

Had he dared, dared to provoke her, dared to

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face his own fearful spirit, he would have added to the first, "Ask Daniel," and to the second, "Nothing." He did not know what he wanted to do; he could only run through the catalogue of things he did not want to do—law, the Diplomatic, business, research, Civil Service, teaching.

There was always music. But he could not say that to her, because she, like Daniel, disapproved of it as a career. He would never be able to support himself by it.

"Or did he imagine himself a genius?" his mother snorted.

Daniel was always urging him to wait: if Tiber no longer existed by the time Roley went down, some other job would always turn up.

"Take an extra year at Oxford," Dan urged. "She could easily afford it now, with all the rest of us off her hands. It doesn't matter about your work 'not leading anywhere.' Anyway it's a stupid question, and I'd just tell her so."

But when it came to facing his mother alone, Roland forgot half the reasons supplied him and funked the rest. He wanted to yell at his mother and tell her how he loathed this torture of being used like a rope in a tug-of-war; how he dreaded having to answer to her for having yielded to Daniel's pressure (as if anyone could resist it! Let her try! And, anyway, it was not pressure, but advice and support for which he was extremely grateful) and having to explain it away to Daniel whenever he had yielded to hers.

Roland longed too to tell his mother to her face

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that it was to escape this rending conflict that he avoided her as much as he did, as much as he could. It might be cruel to throw her over, but it would be ignominious, cowardly, nay, beyond his strength to give up Dan.

He felt the same peevish impatience with her as with Janet in their childhood. Did his mother not realise how useless, how silly, it was to struggle against a will, aggressive, indomitable, all-embracing, protective? As well try to dig through with a spade to the other side of the world.

It had been his sister whose lack of realism had made him suffer as a child. It was his mother's now. Always women were at the bottom of his trouble; stupid, hateful, untrustworthy. His mother never realised, it seemed, that her antagonist was not him, Roland, but Daniel. Her battle was no concern of Roland's at all. Curse her, for giving him such a time! Blind idiot! She deserved all she got. She simply asked for it. But he was damned if he would stand it longer than necessary. He damned well *would* leave her. He didn't care how much she cried and did the lone-widow stunt; he could not endure this railing and wailing much more.

Roland's face became hard, assuming unknown to him an expression imitative of his brother's when he became hard. Clothing himself in this vicarious brutality, hoping, it must be, to draw thus into himself some of his brother's cold courage and egoistic will-power, Roland turned deafer ears than ever to his mother's attacks, flank or frontal.

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So she abandoned words altogether, and set herself indefatigably to win him, soften him, by deeds. She bought him bedroom slippers and mufflers, knitted him socks and ties, reproached him no longer for spending his allowance on travel when it was given him for clothes. She made ready his dress clothes before he went out to dine, and warmed his pyjamas when he was returning late.

At the end of a week's such campaign, she stood facing him as he was kissing her good night politely, cruelly cold, dropped her hands at arm's length upon his shoulders, and said tremulously, the tears welling into her miserable eyes, her lower lip puckered and trembling like a child's: "Roland, look at me. No, look at me!"

Roland took the bull by the horns and with no alternative looked straight in her eyes, staring with controlled unresponsiveness as at a doctor's fingertip. He realised with ludicrous clarity and irrelevance as he attempted to do so that you cannot literally look a person in the eyes; only in the eye. And so he fixed his stony gaze first on his mother's left pupil—he hated her black irises—then on her right.

He was concerned lest she should take his shifting gaze for moral vacillation. He was ready at a moment to explain to her with brutal frivolity the cause of his own eye movements, should she refer to them. He thrust into his gaze blank ignorance of her meaning, a disclaimer of all responsibility for her unhappiness. She had brought it on herself (yes, he did really understand her meaning); so his

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mother must either let the situation go untouched, or make the first move herself.

But her tears confused her vision. She might have seen else that she need only wait for the contact of her hands to break him. Those hands upon his shoulders were hardly to be endured. Roland wanted to snatch his mother's wrists, wrench them from his shoulders, and hurl her from him. The touch of her hands upon him made him shudder. If she did not lift her hands away that instant he would scream, he would kill her, he would not be responsible for his actions. He locked his passions in his heart; with his unaided will he petrified his arms, and all the muscles of his body. But his passions burst their prison like a paper bag, and his stone muscles tingled with living blood. Her hands burned him, pressed him down, hung on him, festooned his neck like chains. They bound him, drew him to her like the cord which had joined him to her when yet a part of her body—before he had begun a life of his own. He was her baby, dependent on her, nursed by her, lulled, comforted, cradled by her. He had depended on her!

Ah, hateful, hateful! But not now, no more, no, never again! Away with those horrible, appealing, feline hands. Hateful, firm, gentle woman's hands. Mothers' hands dragging grown men to them, weighing them down, paralysing their wills, making soft, helpless babies of them. Life-destroying, will-sucking, loathsome mothers. Smother your horrible unreasoning animal-instinctive appeals! Keep your hands away!

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And Roland's borrowed stoniness of gaze changed into burning hate, authentic, overpowering. With worlds spinning a million times a minute in his head, with waters roaring in his ears, his hands and arms moving slowly, jerkily, like a monster marionette's, his fingers curled round his mother's cool wrists, lifted them, dragging her clinging fingers from his shoulders, and lowered her hands against her mournful dress. His shoulders burned, his fingers burned, his eyes ached, his throat was blocked.

"I can put out my own clothes, thanks very much, really."

"But I like to do things for you."

"Yes, but I can't bear your waiting on me!"

"But, why not? Mayn't I, when it gives me pleasure?"

"Because I *can't*. I can't *stand* your waiting on me!"

He shrieked it at her; his body gathered itself together as his lungs expelled the air.

"Very well, then. I'm sorry. Good night."

And she trailed out of her son's bedroom, biting her trembling lip, unloved, alone, alone.

"Good night," his voice as hard as a hangman's.

Roland flung himself face downward on the bed, groaned, shuddered.

She had touched him. How could he resist? How could he torture her and himself like this? But like a hypnotised sleep-walker he was paralysed except when the hypnotiser willed him to move; will-less, except as the hypnotiser willed him to will. He must go on. His part was written for him.

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He had to act it. He had no will. Therefore, he acted his part like a good puppet, only twitching slightly every now and then.

Which of the two—his mother or his brother—did he hate? Which did he love? Neither, both. Both, neither.

Which? He did not know.

IV

EVEN before things reached this pitch, they were almost more than Roland could bear. He suffered from a dual control, only one half of which was admissible to his mind. He longed for a solution which would not need to be put in motion by himself. Logic pointed out that there were three solutions: his mother might die; his brother might die; he might die. Common sense pointed out that there was only one—the first. That was the only solution—his mother should die. When she had died—but she was not sixty yet—many of his burdens would automatically roll off him, possibly all. He would be freed from the dreadful choice of living with his mother and provoking his brother's disapproval, perhaps losing him altogether, or keeping his brother's benevolence and wounding his mother and himself.

How he hated her loneliness, her accusatory, forlorn, pathetic widowhood. How he hardened his heart and his face when she asked, begged, wept clingingly, for him to come to her for his next vacation, or even stay in her company—"give her the happiness of his"—for just an evening.

No! She had been a devil to them when they were children, helpless, dependent. They had warned her that they would desert her when the time came; and they had deserted her. Quite right

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too. Let her stew in her own juice! And Roland heaved a sigh of relief as he slammed the front door behind him and obliterated by force of will the picture of his mother sitting in hopeless black, upright, in the middle of the sofa. He came back later from dinner with his brother and Eileen in the hope that his mother would have gone to bed. But no; there she sat with dull, accusing eyes: cold, wounded, aching, proud. Her deadly composure struck more deeply than her hysterical tears; and Roland longed to escape at once to bed, defiant independence precariously seated in his eyes, guilt, horror at his inhuman cruelty, at his slow, cold-blooded torture of her, beating in his heart.

He had to resist her, had to! Daniel was right. It was their lives or hers. No, he could never live with her permanently when he left Oxford. Cost what it might—her a living death, him a scar for life—he would have to leave her.

The lamp poured its soft and shaded rays over her hellish, unhappy face; her firm hands, which he loved and which made him feel like a child, moved stealthily over her black sewing; and she sat, resolved to be a martyr, tormenting him, drop for drop, for every wound with which he bled her, twist for twist for every turn with which he racked her. The more lonely and widowed she looked and acted, the more savagely callous Roland forced himself to be.

As long as she did no more, her mere unhappy presence goading him both to rebel and to relent, Roland existed in a state of unstable equilibrium

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from which he might have fallen on to her side, as the less unendurable of the two, at any moment. But when his mother, her judgment failing under the weight of her despair, was foolish enough to tax him, nag him about being out late so often, and to show inquisitiveness about his movements on the pretext of household arrangements, then she drove him from her.

He wanted to be free. The possibility, the desirability, of having a love affair had alone nearly determined him to leave her already. He felt even more cramped and guilty in her presence than away from it, by himself, whenever an actual and not merely an imitation sexual situation arose. His mother froze him in the presence of pretty women; pretty women were frozen by him in the presence of his mother. He felt his mother's eye on him, imaginarily or not, at the faintest reaction on his part to anyone attractive of his own age. Yet it was always evident from her manner that she liked him to flatter eligible young women who came to tea, while frowning and becoming vaguely and sternly allusive if things were even inclined to become "vulgar" or "nasty" or "disgusting." But it was just then, and only then, that he ever began to lose his nervousness and to be able really to enjoy himself.

He hated his mother for this treatment of him; it was like her old habit of offering him the choice of milk pudding or a sweet, and, when he chose the sweet, commanding him to eat the milk pudding. It was even worse, because she positively encouraged

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him to choose the sweet, let him bring the spoon to his lips, and then—and only then—knocked it with harsh reproof away from his teeth.

Sprawling rudely, sulkily silent, in the deep arm-chair, he stared, he in the shadow, she in the rays of that conspiring lamp, at the maddening movements of her sewing hands. How well he understood her methods of attack! How well she understood his of defence! But how much else about her could he read? How much, being under arms, dared he read? What did she know of his thoughts and life, except only what affected her? Would she not have shuddered, could she have seen the rest?

Staring, sprawling, Roland contributed to the desultory chatter with the minimum of pains.

"Where have you been, dear?" his mother was asking.

"Oh, to dinner with a friend."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Was it a nice dinner?"

"Yes, thanks."

Rebuffed along that road, driven, disconsolate, to the trivial, Myra smiled bravely and continued.

Had he noticed the new cook? Rather young, perhaps, but she seemed a nice little thing. Really, an extremely pretty gairl. Her name was Alexia, oddly enough.

Mrs. Greer's attitude to the girl's good looks was like that of a Sultan who, feeling in pleasant humour, deigns to pass over the presumption of a favourite who has forgotten she belongs to the lower orders.

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Had he noticed her? Had he noticed her!

She was slim, pale, straight-featured, with shining red lips and goddess's grey eyes, laughing demurely through black lazy lashes, and he burned with desire for her. He undressed her (he was no gentleman) with his mind's eye, and had been for these weeks obsessed by the innocent movements of her virgin limbs till he could have thrown himself upon her with the howls of a barbarian. Once he encountered her when she was carrying a pile of plates downstairs. He moved from one side to the other to let her pass, when in confusion she dropped a knife. He picked it up, thinking, "Now I could see her legs if I dared look, but she would report me to Mother, or the parlourmaid might see, and tell Mother I'd been flirting."

Still, he managed to touch the girl's finger as he handed back the knife, and, though he did not thrill—the finger was small, red, rough, and the nail was dirty—he half thought of inviting her to come to a cinema one evening. He might kiss her hand and fondle her breasts.

He drank in the gaze from her grey limpid eyes as she thanked him, answered "Not at all" as to a distant cousin, and walked on up the stairs.

"No-o. Oh yes, I think I have. Ye-es, quite pretty, I suppose. I hadn't noticed," he purred tonelessly, distending his nostrils and looking down his nose.

"You are an unobservant youth!" his mother scolded archly.

Deliberately adopting the manner and expression

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of a youthful, untested misogynist, self-confident in his indifference to, and immunity from, the charms of girls, he asked: "Am I?" with demure deceitfulness, letting his mother see that he (the self-confident misogynist) secretly took her scolding as a compliment.

Yes, there he lounged, smirking, while his mother sat archly chiding, indulging in her stupid game of playing mother-in-law of Venus (if nothing worse, he felt dimly) to his Adonis.

Suppose he stopped smirking; suppose he clenched his teeth, pushed the vase of flowers uncouthly off the table with his cuff, leant forward suddenly and snarled his true feelings in her face—what would she do then?

"Have I noticed her, the little nymph? Yes! And I've had no peace because of my dreams about her body. I think she's fascinating. I want to kiss her, sleep with her, make her love me. I shall take her to the cinema to-morrow and see if I can seduce her.

"Unobservant, I am? Do you know I physically desire more girls than all the acquaintances you've ever had, put together? That, for that reason, I can remember at least fifty faces of women I've never even known, and could describe their appearances down to the last wave of their hair?

"You think I'm unobservant, do you? You want to guide me gently by the hand into the realm of Eros? You'd like to introduce me to all the plump black curvilinear Jewesses who live round Hyde Park and Bayswater, and go over their points

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in private with me afterwards one by one and instruct me in the choice of a Jewish daughter-in-law for you? Some charming gairl, eh? Well, you shan't! I'll never marry, least of all a Jewess. No wild oats for me, eh? Just a few naughty little drawing-room, London season flirtations, but then a good, pure, plain, young Jewish fiancée, one who'd 'make me happy,' I suppose. Charming picture! And I should 'make such a delightful husband,' shouldn't I? Jews generally do. 'They are so faithful and sober.' I know. Well, Madam, I must shatter your dreams.

"Do you remember once asking me why I was so determined never to marry? I could not tell you. But since you are curious, you shall know. Because I consider the outcome of the marriages I knew most of. Whose were those? First and foremost, yours. You were widowed. Might not I be? Your children, all of them, hate their mother. Might not mine? And did you love your brothers and sisters? Did you love your mother? Not a reassuring picture for the younger generation, is it? Hardly a beautiful enough precedent to encourage me to satisfy your sentimental longing for a grandchild! Or is it a primæval instinct for immortality? That's not much more reasonable, is it?"

The sneers rang in Roland's ears; they rushed upon him, tumbled over one another in his mind, burning to be uttered. But he locked them with all his other passions in his heart, and continued to smile coquettishly at his mother.

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"Perhaps you have heard enough?" he asked in fantasy, seeing her pale face staring open-mouthed in his seething imagination.

"Ah! But that was my reason *then*. *Now* I have another, too. I dread, I hate, I despise, women. I desire them, but cannot talk to them. I dream about their bodies, but sweat in their company, woo them in my mind like a poet, stand by them at a party like a dumb ox, or talk about the weather like a clerk from Surbiton. At nights I play with them, when they aren't there, though I have just sulked at a party where there were half a dozen free-lovers.

"I can't approach them. I can't smile at them; I can't dance with them. I can't even talk to them. I *am* made differently from everybody else. Why? Why? Why? How will a woman ever fall in love with me if I'm a stone gawk, a commonplace lout? Why can I talk wittily with men and only mouth dullness to a girl? Why? Answer me that! It is you who are responsible, you! Know that I hate you for it! You've crippled me, you, with your silly wicked ways. And now, like a witless fool, you want to see me a youth about town, fascinating, making a 'catch,' I suppose, of all the beauties.

"There's only one sort of woman I dare approach (and this may interest you), the kind towards whom I can feel least guilty, least inferior—the kind who may not resist my advances, if I make them; to whom, if I choose, they can be reduced to a minimum. Well, do you know the answer? It is a simple

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formula, surely? I'll help you: they must be members of the lower classes. What? . . . Not understand yet? How very dense you are, aren't you, Mother? Well, since you still can't find the missing word, I'd better give the answer.

"Prostitutes.

"Charming, not so? The formula fits perfectly, you see, doesn't it? They cannot resist one's advances, if they are paid for them.

"As a matter of fact, I had just been with one yesterday, when you inquired so tactlessly what I had been doing. But I couldn't rise to the occasion."

He felt himself lean forward and stare viciously in his mother's face. Again the lamp's soft rays seemed to conspire in searching out the pathos of her features; again he lost hearing of her talk. He sat, with compromise between fantastic vehemence and controlled formality stiffening his limbs, a staring, stupid waxwork.

"Yes, it all makes a charming story for one who is intended to become a sober, faithful, Jewish husband, doesn't it? Still," Roland concluded his ghostly monologue, "it's the only item so far. I can say that, if it is any consolation to you. At least, not counting the peculiar discoveries which my own unguided instincts and the misguided ones of some of my companions revealed to me at that noble public school of mine. But that, I agree, is too usual to count. Certainly, since neither you nor my fine-spirited masters ever explained 'The Mysteries of Sex,' as the clergy call them, I presume it is considered usual. Or is it not?"

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"Well, dear mother, whose fault is it that your son's morals are so deplorable? That his manhood is so feeble? Ah! Yours. Yours, you devil! Yes, I hate you!"

It was a good thing that this tirade was never uttered, this sordid history never revealed. How hurt, how horrified, how shattered Roland's poor mother would have been. And, after all, why blame her? Had she not done everything she could? Was her ignorance really her fault?

This was exactly what he objected when Daniel sneered at her, so that he hated Daniel. Ah yes, but Roland loved her, as well as hated her; Daniel, he felt, did not. No one was allowed to attack their mother except himself—except Roland. If their mother did feel guilty at a direct sexual reference, could she help it, or stop a child noticing it, feeling it?

Anyhow, Roland's brother was her son, too. He did not seem to have suffered in this way. He was married very happily, it seemed. Very well then. Roland was not made differently from everybody else, was he? He seemed to fancy he was the first person who had ever been fluttered by a pretty face, the only bashful boy who had ever trembled at a petticoat's approach. A lot of exaggerated nonsense! Making a martyr of himself was perfectly disgusting. It was stupid. Imagining things never did any good.

Thus did he, impelled according to habit, inflame inward conflict by urging his adversary's imagined argument more fiercely than his own imagined tirade, to expiate his own guilt and quieten his remorse.

V

ROLAND spent the greater part of the vacations of his second year in travel, ignoring his mother's wishes that he should allow her to see something of him. But his desire to travel was the excuse, not the cause, of his avoidance of her. In the spring holiday he lived in London secretly by himself in rooms, and during these four weeks he met Winifred Miller. She was a waitress in a restaurant near his rooms where he used to take most of his meals.

It was his first love-making since his adventure with the prostitute, and he had felt at that time that a waitress might suit his psychological needs perfectly. A waitress was not a prostitute; therefore, there was the possibility they might love. She was of the lower classes; therefore, he would feel hardly at all inferior or guilty.

He manœuvred one afternoon to a table alone, at which he saw Winnie serving, and, while she leaned against a wall resting, he caught her eye and winked at her. He nearly vomited into his teacup—felt he must sink through the floor at such horrible behaviour. But she smiled at him; he invited her to "the pictures" (his imagination—perhaps rightly—never seemed able to advance beyond the cinematograph as a first move in a flirtation) and took her for drives—innocent drives broken only by high tea

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in country hotels at Windsor or Guildford—in outrageously expensive hired Daimler motor-cars.

The very first time in the car she spoke like an honest girl. She didn't know if he was out for something or not, but she didn't want him to take her out in motor-cars and expect something he wasn't going to get. See? That was all; only she just wanted him to know.

Palpitating with guilty shame at his dishonourable intentions being so simply divined, he replied, "of course not." He didn't "expect" anything. He simply enjoyed her company and was very happy being with her, that was all. She smiled at him in a tomboyish way and told him he was nice and—Oo! look at that lovely building over there! Was that The Castle?

Then they went down to Kew by boat. They kissed many times, but her favours were confined to that. She was ardent and she grew fond of him. He soon discovered it and asked her straight out to let him love her. But she stubbornly refused.

"And what would you think of me afterwards if I did? Boys always look down on a girl who's gone about with other fellows before she's married, and they know they would too afterwards themselves, however much they want her at the time."

But Roland refused to give in.

Walking round and round the blazing beds of tulips, which swayed their gorgeous stately heads at him in faint mockery, in and out of the musky, spicy fragrance of the wallflowers, along the broad, ruddy, crunching gravel walk between the giant

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glasshouse and the water-lily tanks, he reiterated with plaintive, pleading gestures, oblivious to the effects of such remarks being overhead: "But why? Why won't you sleep with me? No, I don't understand! I shouldn't think less of you; naturally not. I should think more." But he knew in his heart (though he had never considered the point before she put it to him) that he was lying.

They lay on the grass under a tree and he pressed her to him and kissed her pretty lips, but she would give no more. Indeed, she could not have just then, for a horrible park-keeper came up to them and gave them a coarse, insolent reprimand and told them to sit up apart and behave themselves, and she had better pull her skirt down. Roland boiled, but restrained himself. Still, her debit account received its first item.

They went down to Maidenhead and cuddled warmly but innocently in a punt all the afternoon. They had eggs and tinned fruit salad at a deserted hotel—the season had not begun—and then returned by train, having a first-class compartment to themselves.

He stood up against her, touched her soft chestnut hair with his fingers, circled her with his arms, and kissed her on the warm young lips. She kissed him back; and when he asked her to tell him that she was fond of him, she replied, what did he want to know that for? She had said he was a nice boy, hadn't she? Well, then . . . and, Oo! look at The River! Wasn't it lovely with the moon on it?

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So his tenderness waxed and then waned. What he had was plain downright lust.

"But why, why won't you sleep with me?"

But she wouldn't. She was an honest girl, a darling, sweet girl. She fell in love with Roland, but she wouldn't.

He spent all one afternoon composing his shabby letter of good-bye, and saw her once more after that—because she asked for it. He hired a car again, just to show her that he had not "expected" anything when he had first done so, and they went over all their arguments again. She tried to keep him, poor thing, but she had not the art, nor the experience.

Roland never saw her again. She sent him a romance by Berta Ruck a few weeks later with a pitifully transparent letter. He wrote to her kindly for it, but remained firm. He was already cold.

His innocent adventure with Winnie, however, would not have been possible but for a rich relative dying conveniently a few months before, and leaving Roland, as too his brother and sisters, a comfortable bequest.

Roland enjoyed his money, but at the same time his conscience, still sensitive in some degree to the memory of its "objection" in the War, was apt to prick him and induce the feeling that he should spend his resources in more serious ways.

Money everywhere was still flowing freely; the manacles of Versailles had not long been forged round the limbs of the Allies' prostrate victim; and interest in foreign politics and economics ran high—

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at least it was at high-water mark, however low that might be.

The International Bureau flourished. But, the manacles once securely fastened, and the sentence inscribed with gold pens encased in silver caskets on marble tables in a crystal hall; the nib of the pen, the handles of the casket, the legs of the tables and the crystal of the hall having been photographed three hundred and sixty-five times, before, during, and after the event, from each end, from each side, from above, and from below; the interests of the peoples (the victorious peoples—that of the vanquished, like the number of their massacred and mutilated, did not count) began to wane. Teschen and lignite, Prinkipo and brown coal, Annexe 1, clauses 8, 9 and 10 of the Sentence, all were forgotten in the dawning of the Golden Age. Periodicals, technical, political, military and naval, which had flourished before, died swift, rustling deaths, and were never heard of again. Extirpated or swallowed by the swollen, swelling giants of the journalist world, the busy little ants which produced these mountains and rivers of paper, vanished, one by one, and their frenzied labours of organisation were overturned and forgotten in a night.

The turn of Tiber drew near. But Jewish ants take more swallowing than some, and Danny worked like ten.

"If Rome wasn't built in a day, Tiber shan't be dried up in a night!" he vowed grimly, mopping the sweat from his brow, never saying die, and pumping courage into his lieutenant Roland.

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But his lieutenant was also undergraduate Roland, and, though the criterion for his industry might, for his general, be the skill with which it was applied, this was unlikely to satisfy his tutor or examiners. Frequent and surreptitious absence at the London office of Tiber, hours spent every week in translation of economic reports, did not help the undergraduate to familiarise himself with the principles, even if it did the lieutenant with the applications, of sound economics.

Exams drew nearer, but Tiber still tottered dangerously, and Dan still sent S.O.S.'s as paid workers had to be dismissed and funds diverted to advertising the activities of Tiber to an indifferent world. Roland was not averse to taking a little time off from his academic duties now and then—leisure was beneficial; that was really why one went to Oxford—but he began to look a little anxiously at his post, and his heart took to beating at the sight of a telegram.

To refuse to go on rushing backwards and forwards between Oxford and London when Tiber and, still worse, Dan were in distress, seemed inhuman, impossible. Yet he would have to stop some time, even though it might be strictly untrue to say so at any moment, or that he "must" work. Must was comparative (and so was work); if he had managed for two years, one more week could not matter. He had said that he enjoyed it; he could not leave the ship now that it seemed in danger of sinking. No, that was true; and this was true, and the other was true. Still . . .

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Dan—he was a Jew—had taken the wise and simple precaution of creating Tiber debentures and issuing them all to his brother and himself. In the event of bad times, therefore, any creditor rash enough to press a claim too impetuously might find that he had killed the goose that laid the golden eggs, and might also therefore be more easily deterred. But creditors will not wait for ever, and even if it means killing gold egg-laying geese, they sometimes take steps.

This crisis, this disaster, was what, during the third year of Tiber's life, gradually crept closer and closer till it seemed nearly touching Dan's face. Over and over again he dangled a carrot in front of docile eyes and led the ass away in another direction. But he seemed to have taken for an ass what was a mule, for at last the carrot failed to divert; the ass or mule—whichever it might be—refused to bite, but instead, without any warning, raised a stinging dust with its obstinate heels. Dan telegraphed at once a frantic summons to the other debenture-holder, and a council of war, followed by a parley for a truce, was held without delay. By ingenuity, eloquence, and guile, with persistence, with resilience, and optimism, only credible in a Jew, Daniel succeeded in persuading his mulish creditor at the eleventh hour to refrain from bankrupting his beloved Tiber.

At a terrible price he bought the mule off. Skinned almost of everything he had, having accepted with gratitude, though not too much show of feeling, not a little of the skin of his

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lieutenant, utterly overcome by this last struggle, Dan crept away to build up his organisation once again.

Roland, feeling shaky, scared, not a little bitter at his general's defeat, not a little guilty at his own share of unwisdom in the disaster, decided to keep away from fire so far as his responsibility and loyalty to his salamander brother would allow. The dreadful fact still confronted him that he was in effect pledged to enter Tiber when he went down from the University. If Tiber were smashed before then he would be freed; hence the conflict and terrible temptation which he had just endured.

It was already agreed that when he left Oxford he should become a partner.

It would be a greater burden, a more dangerous responsibility, financially risky and unprofitable, but he had taken gifts, generous gifts, from Dan when he, Roland, was at school, before joining the Army, and he had not forgotten.

Dan had interfered with school authorities, alienated himself from his mother, discredited himself with her friends, risked the same with his own, and made himself disliked by people on all sides, solely in trying to move heaven and earth to save Roley from the trenches. Roland could not shirk responsibility now. No, he must see the whole thing through, and when a year or two later they were able to judge of the future, then would be time enough to leave. Dan was not even asking for more. He only wanted Roland's help, the use of his name (perhaps of a little of his money) with

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which to fob off and impress creditors and clients, and he was absolutely positive he could build up the organisation more firmly than ever. Roland was then to be released, if he wanted, and Daniel would find a permanent assistant to take his place.

Yes, there was no doubt in which direction the path of duty lay. Roland swallowed hard and set his face like a man.

VI

RETURNING from the mule's attack on Tiber, Roland reached Oxford gloomy and disheartened late one afternoon. He had had neither lunch nor tea, partly through lack of time, partly because he had felt, with not a little bitter satisfaction, that he might as well begin economising straight away. The nightmare situation in which he had become embroiled by Daniel or himself—it was hard to say which—grew mercifully fainter, as the undisturbed, academic world came nearer. He reached his rooms tired, and, now that the need for keeping his mind taut was past, suddenly overwhelmed by a feeling of cruel, unendurable strain. It was certain that he would be rude to the first person who accosted him.

Letters and a parcel lay on his table. The writing on the parcel he recognised—his mother's. He glanced at it testily, opened the letters first by way of spite, then dropped into a deep chair, and, with his elbows pushed out over the arms, unwrapped the parcel, took out the note which was inside, and furrowed open the flap, roughly, rudely, with his thumb.

"MY DEAR ROLAND,"

his mother began, and his heart leaped into quick and anxious life. "My" and "Roland" meant

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a "row." She must have been feeling stern when she wrote. Did she know anything about Tiber?

"Here are the two pairs of pyjamas. I have made pockets for them as you asked. I think you will find them worth while, though of course not so elegant as a shop-made pair; but it is thoroughly good material, and they work out at only 15 s. a pair, which is cheap, at present prices.

"I am sorry to say that this will be the last piece of sewing I shall be able to do for you for some time. I saw Dr. Burton yesterday, and he has strongly advised me to have an operation immediately; and as it is serious I may not be strong again for some time, if indeed, I recover, which I may quite likely not. I am to go into a nursing home in five days (Dr. B. has found me a *very* nice one). Do you think you could get leave from your Tutor to come up for a few days? Naturally, I should like to see you, but, of course, if it's awkward to manage I shall understand.

"It's the same sort of thing as Aunt Lia's illness last year, only this is much worse. Don't worry yourself, my dear boy; I have told the others, so I shall have someone with me, and I am putting everything in order first, so as to make everything as easy as possible for you all.

"It's been very cold all this week, so I hope you'll make use of the 'pyjams'!

"Your loving mother,

"MYRA GREER."

Whenever his mother's meaning in a letter was not clear at sight, whenever a sentence was intelligible only after reading forward (a construction to which she always resorted when she was coldly angry and a storm was brewing) Roland's stomach began to stir, he had to suppress a thud of cold terror and a racing in his heart, and to summon a courage which was supported by a fascination to

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know the worst. But these primary reactions were physical sensations; they were always the same, no matter what a letter might contain. The emotions which followed depended on the letter's content. But through this association of the two reactions, all his mother's letters, indeed all important-looking letters, had something of the same flavour.

Roland read the letter through a second time, then sat still doing nothing.

"She would. Just like her. Anyway, why the hell should I go up to town again? I don't believe it's serious at all. She's obviously piling it on. She would. Just like her. She says she won't mind if I don't come up. I suppose I ought to, though.

"I wonder what the others are doing? I'd better tell Dan. I bet she'll try the sob-stuff on him. Through Freddie, I suppose, or Myer.

"I wonder—ought I to go up, after all? Oh! I can't again after all that ghastly business. Besides, I shall never get any work done at this rate. Besides, if I go she's certain to try and make me get Dan to see her. Damn her and the pyjamas too! I hope to hell she does die at last. Yes, it would solve a lot!"

"DEAR MOTHER,

(Roland wrote at once to get it over)

"Thanks very much indeed for the pyjamas. They'll be awfully useful. I hope they weren't too trying to make.

"I am *dreadfully* sorry to hear you've got to have an operation. It's awfully sudden, isn't it? I hope it isn't

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really as serious as you say you think. But still, I agree, if Dr. Burton advises it at once, it would be a responsibility not to have it. I'm glad the others know.

"As a matter of fact, I've not been feeling frightfully fit lately, and I'm rather badly behindhand with my work. So I think, if you don't mind, that I won't come up to town now. In any case, it's only three weeks till term ends, you see, so it won't be long, will it? And I'll see you then, of course. Perhaps we can go away together for you to convalesce?"

"I know you'll understand about my not coming up. I'll ask Janet to let me know how everything goes. Don't worry.

"Your loving son,
"ROLAND D. GREER."

A little defiant, a little proud at his heart's hardness, a little nervous at his nerve, Roland got up to take the letter to the post. His fatigue on moving out of his chair made him change his mind and wait for the last post which might bring news from Daniel, and until he had, anyway, to go out to dinner.

His mind was filled with two questions: Was the news really true? Was his attitude correct?

Surely his mother would not be able to resist improving the occasion were she suffering from the most mild complaint. He might rely on her to strike an attitude of patient and pathetic fortitude, calculated to torment her children and to force them into a needlessly cruel dilemma of appearing unfeeling brutes, or sacrificing themselves for the thousandth time to her witless craving for tyranny.

But if her plaint was to be that she had borne a

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brood of dragons, then dragons let them be. They might still be defenceless against the dexterity of her rapier play, with which she pricked the most sensitive regions of their hearts; but they were old enough now to counter with the whips of logic. More, they could bully themselves and intimidate one another into hardening their hearts; they could persuade themselves with sardonic force that she was playing the hypocrite, and mete out to their mother in her extremity cold punishment for a crime which they positively needed to suppose committed.

They would teach her to raise false alarms, to harrow them heartlessly, to be such a disgusting vampire for pity! They would teach her to play to the gallery and poison the minds of her friends against them! If she enjoyed posing as the lonely mother of callous children, they would pose as the callous children of a lonely mother. And if they could not be callous they would be stoical. She should never have the delight of knowing how she wrung them, dragged at them, made them hold one another back.

But Roland, at heart ready to be a sinner and yield to the pitiful appeal of his mother's loneliness, had a further task for stern accomplishment. He must out-Herod Herod. He must be stonier than the stone which, and which alone, his brother, his general, offered to their mother, their enemy. His zeal must be above suspicion, his cruelty, his grotesquely premature cynicism, coldly perfect. Polite he might be, if he pleased, but cool, in-

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accessible, hard. Any attitude which might be "correct" for him to assume meant, could only mean, one which his brother and sisters, which his brother would approve. Roland's letter was all this, and at the same time he felt that colder, more guarded, Mephisto himself could not have made it. The pain of the unnatural wrench with which he forced himself unconsciously thus to withstand his mother's appeal, could and must, as usual, be obliterated by the approval, or the praise, of his commander.

Roland's anxious ideal was always to anticipate his brother's reactions in the most exact degree; but so erratic, so unpredictable, was the precise intensity of these that Roland dared not do otherwise than play for safety by striving to exhibit, in a superlative degree, the qualities his brother might show in a lesser. Roland was to Daniel as the shadow before is to the coming event, except that this shadow was sometimes darker than the object.

Roland reflected grimly that his brother, who, he knew, would no more think of yielding now to pathetic appeals from his mother, or her permanent agents, the unpopular uncles, than on any previous occasions, could hardly disapprove of his younger brother's zealous disregard for convention and for their relatives', not to mention their mother's, feelings. Roland had only promised to keep in touch with Janet. And that would be useful, in case their mother died. He might send some flowers to the nursing home; it would perhaps

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temper, even disguise, his callousness, and Daniel need not know.

It was late. There had been no post.

Roland slipped on his gown, took his letter to his mother in his hand, and went out to dinner in Hall. It was raining. He turned up his gown like a hood over his head, stuffed his hands into his pockets, and ran. He entered his college through a gateway where he knew there was a letter-box, and walked into Hall as dinner was beginning.

Sitting among talkative, satisfied, self-satisfied, innocent, care-free young men, Roland felt dissatisfied, wise, care-worn, and important. They were children; he was a responsible man. He had a mother who was going to have an operation.

He longed to tell somebody, in order to watch the solemn, considerate, and attentive expression which would come into his hearer's face and voice. Sympathy would be offered to him; the hearer's normal indifference to Roland would be waived. "One must be decent to a man." Ha! Ha! He, Roland, might exact all that if he chose; might compel attention, even though vicarious and fleeting.

But he did not. Their consideration would not touch him; their sympathy would not make them like him. His right to appear pathetic would give him no comfort. Besides, his friends were sitting nowhere near him, and it would be "impossible" to announce the news to a stranger.

He walked slowly out of Hall, waiting as was his wont for someone, any one, of the dozens of young men, all of whom seemed to have dozens of jolly

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friends, to come up to him and invite him to coffee. Not that he would have enjoyed it. He would have been unable to, was always unable to, for nervousness. So he sauntered with preoccupied and self-sufficient air towards the gate, casting unattractive, side-long glances at everyone who overtook him, hoping it was somebody he knew, with whom he might pass a word, and so put off the moment when he must definitely and without hope return to his solitude. But the innocent and self-satisfied young men, or a few other gloomy and unattractive hermits, passed without accosting him, and he reached the porter's lodge with their cursed gaiety clattering past his ears.

He looked in the letter-rack. A writing which had no "thicks" or "thins," in which the pen had never left the paper from the beginning to the end (it must be to save trouble), in which the word "College," even, had not been included, emerged among the other writings before his eyes.

So Daniel knew.

But his letter might be only about the Tiber business; he might not know. Then should Roland tell him? Why should he? "The others" ought to just as much. He would not. Nor would Daniel thank him for it, poor devil, with his other worries.

Roland lifted out the letter (there was threepence to pay; it had not been stamped), and continued to search for others. There was none. Janet and La were taking things very coolly. So much the better; they must have had a dose of the sob-stuff,

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too. His attitude would be in keeping with theirs.

Roland controlled his strained curiosity about Dan's letter till he should be alone, and walked with needless slowness to his rooms. The envelope was thin; Daniel had not much to say, whatever it concerned:—

"I expect you've heard that M.'s got to have an operation. Cancer. I had a letter from Freddie—quite decent—saying that as she might not live M. had asked him to ask me if I'd see her. Am dining with her to-night. Eileen probably arriving Thursday. Of course you're coming up. Send me a line to say time and day.

"It's pretty serious because rapid, but not the painful sort, fortunately, so far as the doctors can tell. We'd better get her into the best nursing home poss. Have hired a fat car.

"Write by return *re* your movements.

"D. G."

Not a word about his reason; not a word about the trouble to him; not a word about the money. Only a man-of-the-worldly attitude of efficient human decency. No recognition that he was as unaccountable as a kitten, and as swift in his decisions as a hawk. He was surprised if others were surprised and left behind, and he took each rationalised attitude of his own—ignoring and forgetting that it might be a complete reversal of the past—as the only rational attitude for all.

"Of course you're coming up."

"Of course."

For what horrors was not Daniel responsible?

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To train Roland all his life to be a dragon, and then to betray him when the day came. To train him to suppress, violate, nearly destroy, all his sensibility to human appeal; to teach him that self came first, always self, and then to yield, to go simply like any loving son to his mother in distress, and leave Roland away on the wrong road with no support, no concealment for his brutality and shame—it was unforgivable.

“Of course.”

As though Daniel could teach him anything about how one feels, how one behaves, to somebody in distress, let alone one's mother! The cynical brute. So Roland must change again.

But his own letter to his mother! It was posted!

There was one chance. The college letter-box might not yet have been cleared. He stood up. If his stomach had stirred before, it revolted now. He felt faint. What he should do if the letter was beyond reach he refused absolutely to consider. He ran downstairs and out into the street, in blind hope that he would reach the letter-box in time, but every whit as much to deaden his anxiety.

Again it was raining, again Roland turned up his gown like a hood over his head, and stuffed his hands into his pockets.

His left pocket felt different from his right. In the right he felt lining, in the left paper. Still running, he took it out; still running, he held the paper before his eyes.

It was a stupid thing to do; he might have knocked a fragile old lady down, or a cross old man.

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It was fortunate for him that it was only his friend Merrington.

"You *are* the limit, Greer!"

"I'm awfully sorry, I say; I simply didn't see."

"Evidently! Give us a hand; my right ankle hurts like hell. Have you a stick?"

"Here you are; I have," said his companion, who was picking up Merrington's books for him.

"Thanks awfully, Fairley," Merrington replied. "Oh, do you two know one another? Greer, this is Fairley."

"How do you do?" said Roland.

"How do you do?" replied the young man, not very warmly. He was not so tall, but looked about the same age as Roland.

Fairley? Fairley? The voice, the auburn hair, the freckles, and the lanky build—yet the thick nose, the pleasant but stupid eyes . . . Fairley . . . ?

"I've got a brother too, but he's not so tall . . ."

"Max Fairley?" asked Roland suddenly. "Oh, no, of course. How . . ."

"My brother's name," interrupted the young man.

"Of course . . . I remember! Is he . . . ?"

"I say, it's pouring with rain; come back and have some coffee; you can talk there and I can lie down," suggested Merrington.

"Oh . . . er . . . I'm afraid I can't. I must write a letter; rather important. I'm very sorry I knocked you down, Merrington. Er . . . good night." Then, turning to Fairley: "I think your

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brother used to know mine—Daniel Greer. They were at school together. Is your brother . . . ?”

“Oh, used they? Really? Well, er . . . good-bye.”

Roland was taken aback, and for the moment completely transported. That voice. His mother, Dan, his letter, cancer, money, death, all receded; the warm image of a guardian angel was thrust forward and occupied his whole consciousness. He must reach Max—nothing else mattered. Max still remembered him, still liked him—it must be so.

Then Roland’s eyes re-focused on that grotesque image of his god, and he came to himself. Indifference—no, hostility, stared him in the face.

“. . . Oh . . . er, good-bye.”

Either Max had heard about the conscientious objection and the brother knew, or Max was dead—killed in the War. Which? Which?

Roland had not the courage to ask in the face of such coldness—or reserve.

Sigmund Freud maintains that if you forget something it is because you wish to rid your mind of the thought. This theory causes many people confusion, because the word “wish” seems to have an unusual meaning if sense is to be made, and because they do not understand how “you” can “wish” to forget something which, it is certain and obvious, you wish to remember. “You,” of course, itself contains a theory. There are two “yous”; there is in you a set of conscious impulses, and another, unconscious. It is these sets which are opposed. Such is the theory. Is it true?

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True or not, it flashed through Roland's mind, as he ran towards his rooms with the letter he had forgotten to post held in both his hands, and he welcomed the theory with a chuckle. So happy was he that he forgot the cause of his relief, and that a painful situation and the prospect of many trials and tribulations still lay before him.

"DARLING MOTHER,

"I am so *terribly* sorry about your having to have an operation. *Of course* I'll come up. I can't get away to-day possibly, I'm afraid, but I'll arrive home to-morrow in time for lunch.

"You must have the very nicest room we can find in a nursing home. Quiet. You're not to start on any economising stunt over this! Don't go and do too much these few days; I shall be able to come up for a week anyhow, and we'll do everything for you. Perhaps we might go away together afterwards for your convalescing? I should so love it. But don't worry about anything *please*, if you can help it.

"Thanks ever so much for the 'pyjams'; they're lovely and warm; the pockets are just as I meant. Till to-morrow. Much love.

"Your loving son,

"R. D. G."

Roland dared not, did not know how to, be more affectionate; as it was, he felt a shade embarrassed. Must not so sudden a change of style and of behaviour seem shallow, even distasteful, to his mother? She might laugh at him and the whole affair in her cold-blooded way, a way she had when she was deeply affected, or in danger, and felt alone. Well, better err on that side than the other.

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But Roland felt his pitch had been horribly queered. Just as he had acted before as cruelly as he dared at the behest—imagined, maybe, but potent for all that—of his brother, so his affectionate response to his mother now must appear due to the same influence. Daniel would again suppose that Roland was merely following example and advice. How he longed to tell Daniel that he was not; that he felt more love and affection with his little finger than Daniel would ever know with all his intellect, his flattery, his considerateness, and deliberately assumed charm.

Roland longed to, but dared not. Instead he wrote to his mother as affectionately as habit would allow him, even looking forward to their meeting, and putting his brother out of his mind.

VII

EVERYTHING was as dramatic, even melodramatic, as it could be. Their mother drove, as it were in state, to the nursing home, accompanied by all four children; then disappeared upstairs into a room with a high bed and glazed walls.

Daniel had returned to the bosom of the family, which only with difficulty controlled its hysterical tendencies, everyone disguising their joy and amazement under the appearance of ensuring a friendliness, almost a subdued gaiety, for the sake of occupying their mother's mind.

Adepts all at being faced with a fact and pretending urbanely it was not there, these skilled jugglers well-nigh overshot the mark. To exhibit relief, openly, involved their implying, if not saying, that mother and Prodigal had been on bad terms before. But this would have been so embarrassing, so utterly out of the question, that, while enjoying the fact, all were at particular pains to conceal it. Yet so happy was their mother with everything coming right now, *so* great was the prize, that it was worth while to admit delicately that something had been wrong before, and comment on it in her new security, deliberately.

This suited her, but not the Prodigal. He was prepared to return for an agreed purpose on

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humanitarian grounds, but not to have the picturesqueness of the situation sentimentally exploited. Besides, Daniel foresaw that the element of reconciled affection would not carry him or his mother very far. When all was said and done, even though he had buried the hatchet, they were strangers; everything that he valued must be antipathetic to his mother, and the same reasons which had made him leave her were, in the main, still present.

He had to pretend that his life was occupied with incidents and interests of such an order that the most interesting was forgotten, the most moving faded, and the most important appeared utterly trivial beside the absorbing change of life involved by his reconciliation with her. Yet he had horrible anxieties which he must now, at all costs, conceal, and which coloured his manner and conversation in a way that could hardly be disguised. It was difficult enough in any case to rise to such a situation, to be unstilted, helpful. But Daniel's distraction would be mistaken for clumsiness, and his appearance of being ill at ease would be ascribed wholly, instead of in part, to his mother's presence.

"Still the same," thought Myra. "Roley is still under his influence, and Dan still under Roley's. Will they never break away from one another and be themselves? Roland is trying to please Dan as much as me. . . ."

"Well, if I never leave the nursing home again, I have had my four children gathered round me at the last!"

She could bear the empty disappointment of her

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dreams. That gathering, which was to have been both the offspring and the parent of warm and mutual love, had passed in mutual embarrassment. But it was worth while. To Myra, being a Victorian, the knowledge of the fact that all her children had been with her, alone gave solace, was in itself a pleasure. To them it was merely sentimental lumber.

Dramatic, even melodramatic. The evening before the operation all four children went together to say good night to their mother in her room, and early next morning they foregathered at the nursing home and went in one by one to say good-bye. There were no tears, but a silent nervous self-control. Their mother suddenly was half terrified at the ordeal before her, supporting herself partly by almost unconscious bravery, partly by subdued enjoyment, to the end, of the farewells with her sons and daughters. The children now were only strained, their mother genuinely sad, for her enjoyment was neither more nor less conscious than her courage.

Standing outside the nursing home together for a few moments, the children felt more guiltily exposed to one another than ever before. Now that the need for acting in their mother's presence, for co-operating in a crisis, was for a time at least suspended, each felt the critical gaze of the others more sharply. The most notoriously brutal had proved the most intelligently considerate; the mildest the most squeamish, helpless, and most self-centred.

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Before they re-divided into camps they were consciously, if fleetingly, united. All felt for one moment as though they were four vultures with their claws in a common prey. All felt like prisoners of a former tyrant who was fallen at last into their power; even a little shamefaced when they realised that she who had lashed them so often in olden times now lay pinioned and helpless.

To exult was so easy that they had no desire. Each knew what the other three were thinking.

"Will she die? Do you think she will die? If only she dies! What a Heaven-sent solution!"

"How much a year more shall we have?"

"Yes, I know it's very terrible, of course. We are sorry for her, of course. Since the chances are that she will die, we can afford to be magnanimous.

"After all, it would be far better for her, too, if she died. Oh, I hope she will! Will she die? Do you think she will die?" But each resented the other's perspicuity—was inclined to snap; perceived that they would see the reason, so controlled himself, herself.

Getting rid of Alexia on a boorishly thin pretext (true, she had tried to borrow five pounds, which they felt excused them. Yet if she was hard up why should she not ask when a knife was entering their mother's breast as at any other time? "Disgusting" they implied, and refused her coldly), Daniel, Janet and Roland went off together to walk in the Park until it was possible to ring up the nursing home for news. If their spirits did not rise, at any rate they were released.

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"What do you think the chances are?"

And for the first time the three ghouls discussed the question with twentieth-century realism, with commendable phlegm, weighing the pros and cons, discussing the medical details, judging the chances, weighing, weighing.

Again Roland found himself dangerously near stranding. His were the most calculating questions, his the most cynical jokes, the most naked greed. Suppressing his tenderer impulses in deference to the presence of Satan, he turned himself into a junior Machiavelli. But Satan, abashed—if not admitting it, committed to an armistice, and perhaps weary of his Satanism, was determined to show, especially to himself, how he not only could be, but at heart was, as decently humane as any man born of woman.

Without further hesitation, Satan, poor Daniel Satan, set studiously to plan arrangements for his mother's convalescence. Fresh flowers must be sent in every day; they could club together for a hired car when she grew better; they would supplement the nursing home food—without Alexia, who could go to hell—and order the lightest dainties from Piccadilly.

Poor Satan. He could not love all of a sudden. He could not sit by his mother's bed and hold her hand. He could not look steadily into her ugly eyes and tell her with his own handsome eyes that came from his father—still less tell her with his tongue—that he was sorry for all the bitter past, "sorry" like a repentant little boy, and hence-

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forward they would be friendly and he would be happy with her. No, it was not true. He could only admit that, the circumstances being as distressing as they were, he was justified in letting his mother meet him again, and that he would be, could guarantee to be, as gentle and considerate as any son. He was sorry for her, to be sure. Not "sorry"—that was untrue and silly—, but "sorry for" her. One would be sorry for anybody in her position.

"Well, if he can't, he can't," thought Myra. "I must take him as he is. Anyway, he's come back.

"He's more like David than ever. But he's so thin. I wonder what he's worried about. He'll never tell me. And I shall never keep him. Why does he resent my loving him? David didn't. Does his wife find the same? He loves his child, yet hates me loving mine.

"Well, if he can't, he can't. I must take him as he is."

Had Daniel realised how much, little though it was, his mother understood him; had he known that she discerned at any rate his reactions to her quite clearly, he would have become hard in stony discomposure, and left her. So his mother acted, too, and talked to him of trifles, following his lead, never pressing for his confidence.

Between Satan I and Satan II, between Satan reformed and his attendant prostitute, walked Janet, balancing unhappily in timid diffidence.

She wanted her mother to die. They had all said it a hundred times in the past; why—

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how—deny it now? She knew the meaning of the word “cancer”; how could one not feel constricted in one’s heart at such a horror? Her greater independence of Daniel put her in a different position from Roland. She was frightened by her elder brother, but was not his subject. He might disapprove of her, of the friendliness and frank succour which she gave their mother, and she dreaded the attack she awaited from that whip, his tongue. But her dread was not so strong as her other feelings, and they would remain.

The plainness of her discomfort chafed Roland. Why could she not throw in her emotional lot with them, with him and his image of his brother, or against them? Why could she not resolve her conflict, and suppress wholly either the one set of impulses or the contrary? Then one could feel at ease. But the presence of this disquiet made ease impossible.

“She went blue after the operation, and they had difficulty in getting her circulation going properly again. She’ll be all right now, they think, but obviously the prognosis is bad. The matron didn’t tell me any more.”

Janet had telephoned to the home.

Once again they weighed the pros and cons, asked Janet to repeat the matron’s exact words, discussed the medical details, judging the chances, weighing, weighing.

VIII

AS their mother regained strength her children referred less to their dashed hopes, and with the air of making the best of a bad job, as a gentleman should, discussed plans for her convalescence.

As their mother lost strength, her children sacrificed their time, their pleasures, and their interests, more gracefully. The three eldest had their own flats; Roland had been living with his mother. But the house was shut up now, for he had been able to take an empty room in the nursing home, and obtained his meals near by. His mother was not an easy patient, and she was able to persuade the matron to let other rooms, which might fall vacant, for the occasional use of Alexia, Dan, or Janet. As things lagged doubtfully, the children gave up their time with less enthusiasm, maintaining their patience and their kindnesses with difficulty.

All of them except Roland; his patience remained unbreakable, his kindnesses increased; his skill in tactful and distracting conversation with their mother grew. His appearance of affection for her, of pleasure in her company, was perfect; he struck without fail just the right note of sincerity and restraint. His brothers and sisters thought him wonderful.

Really, he acted it marvellously. His mother

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should indeed be grateful, and they themselves still more. When Daniel with laughing admiration said so, Roland only laughed mildly and with demure embarrassment. He was modest. Janet, too, expressed jealous praise. He was far better at it than any of them. She couldn't think how he kept it up; the strain was awful.

It was.

To know what to do, what to say, where to look, how to pretend that it came as a shock, when they had hoped, guessed, known it for weeks past, when their mother told them, one at a time that she had forced the doctor to admit she could not live, was beyond the power of all of them. At that moment, they knew, their mother was entitled to the most perfect, the most unstinted emotional return that they could give. Yet at that moment above all they could give nothing.

She held the hand of each in turn, her grey hair, ugly as her eyes, surrounding untidily her fading face, those eyes fastened with horrible self-pity, asking greedily, naturally, and unnaturally, for yet more pity, upon their faces. She smiled wanly, forgetting for the merciful moment that she was really going, that soon she would be a dead person, no person, dissolved. She forgot all in the cherished solace of unconditional condolence which she was exacting and was being paid horribly, deliciously, by her child.

If she could not excite natural love, she could compel pity for a substitute. She could make herself, even if it cost her death, the centre of their

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lives. And even if she were dying, she could still feel irritable, cruel, dissatisfied. If they would not give her love, she would give them a fright. She would retain the consolations of sentimentality to the end, and none of them would dare deny her. The dimensions of her coffin, the present disposal among her heirs of a few valued chattels to escape death duties, these provided some of her cold-blooded diversions; but to discuss matters of such hard fact with her embarrassed her children as much as it gave her relief, pleasure, what you will. To discuss these things involved them in the admission that they knew she was going to die while they lived after her; and at that they felt so guilty that they shunned such conversations, trying with concentrated control to talk of the things of life. But their mother saw through their motives, their artifices, their discomfort, as she had always seen through them; and she brought her children back to her pet topic with subtle tenacity, with inexorable indifference, every time.

"What will you do afterwards, Roley?" asked his mother in such a cool, matter-of-fact tone of voice that she might have been speaking of the impending death of a distant relative, and that Roland forgot it was her own.

"Well, I don't quite know, it depends on . . ."
—"how much you leave me" were the words that were forming on the flow of breath which he was able, barely soon enough, to intercept;—"how I get on with my work at Oxford," he concluded. "But I've not thought about it," he added with

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feeling, taking involuntarily a leaf out of her book.

Only when the cumulative action of weeks of drugs began to take their merciful but horrible effect did the purposefulness of her words leave her.

The spectacle of his mother looking much as she had always looked, but saying queer things, inconsequent in her questions, showing great gaps in her memory, held Roland fascinated, terrified. Better no mother than one who changed before his eyes into a powerless wasted prisoner without a mind.

He did not tell himself he wanted her to live, but he acted so. All his cruelties of the last years, all her misfortunes, her loneliness, courage, sacrifices pelted through his mind, oppressed and overwhelmed him. Tell her that he resented nothing she had ever done him, worshipped her bravery, would fight the world for her, live with her for ever, and devote his life to making up to her for her past miseries, he could not; nor did he know he wanted to. But to do so would have caressed his soul and freed him from half, at any rate, of his bondage.

He wanted to call her "darling," and "mummy," but only dared "my dear," and his usual "mother." He sat with her whenever he could, whenever she wanted him, performing every trivial thing she asked of him with extravagant care, yet kissing her good night with embarrassment.

The horrible vomiting which attacked her ever more frequently made her grey and weak; but even

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when her mind had been wandering just before, she could recover herself then, and, hurrying him out of her room, compel herself with scarcely credible control to observe proprieties which seemed to her as natural now as at any other time. As his mother urged him away, he rushed to the door, eager to escape; then, as she recalled him to give him some fuddled instructions, he stopped, the door half open, one of his legs outside, sheer panic and revulsion staring from his wide eyes.

So he faced her for one moment, and she saw him.

But did she notice his revulsion, his panic desire to flee, and to abandon her? If so she must have felt that he was willing to let her die in pain, unattended in a bare bedroom, with a basin tilting from her hands. Darkness would fill her eyes, mucus dribble from her mouth, a bell-button—mechanical, man-made signal of distress—clutched uselessly against her feeble fingers. She would hear inside her head, "He was running away—Roley. He disliked me. He was running away from me." And then there would be no more "She." "Its" last activity would have been disillusion and reproach.

Roland went to his room and sat down, heart thudding, a blunt pressure in his stomach. Fiend, he was a fiend.

His solitude was rare, for it was in his room in the nursing home that his brother and sisters always gathered. They slept at their own flats, but lived, waited all day in his room. It became a cloak-room, a filthy sandwich bar, a smoking-room. Roland hated them all. Yet he could not refuse

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them. It was all for their mother; and there was nowhere else. They could not intrude upon the nurse. That was only reasonable. But they all took it so much for granted. No doubt they thought they could make up for it by praise for his "acting." He hated them, in order of their weakness.

"She wants to see you, Alexia," curtly he reported later, while they sat out the evening. "She thinks it's morning, and has asked if you had a good breakfast. Say 'yes.'"

"Good night, my dear," said his mother when he returned to her with La. "Promise to have a good breakfast—tsa! I mean lunch. And, Roley, you'll look after your little sister, won't you?"

"Yes, of course, Mother."

"Really, Roley? You promise you will, won't you?"

"Yes, really I promise."

"My little girl!"

"That's all right," added Alexia, trying to adjust her voice to a tone of reverent affection, knowing that Roland was hurrying over his promise because he knew it was a lie.

His mother liked most to have Roland with her, and he was proud of this, but he concealed the fact from his brother and sisters. As he sat beside her he saw a picture of leaden sky, leaden roofs, leaden walls in the frame of the large window behind the dressing-table. His head was near his mother's. That picture would be her last sight of the world. Grey, wet, indifferent, hard. He shuddered. Already it was like a grave.

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It seemed to him that when she was dead she would lie on her side in her coffin and remember, "The last thing I saw of that world was slate and cement—a leaden sky, leaden roofs, leaden walls. They made a picture in a window; nobody cared about my dying. Now I'm in a leaden coffin, and my arms are pinned against my sides, and this picture is too close against my eyes; I can't focus on it, and I can't get rid of it. It's the last thing they let me see. They didn't care."

On the other side of those houses were pavements, wet, grey, hard, on which people moved with purposes. Trivial people, with more trivial purposes, indifferent, indifferent; they did not care that his darling mother, that soft small vulnerable woman with bright dilated eyes in great cups, was being dragged from him. Did she feel that herself?

The sky, the roofs, the walls, all leaden coloured, seemed to him to represent her terrible life; and so clearly, so insistently, that she herself must feel it was this recapitulated vision which was going to kill her. There it hung, a hideous ghost, staring at her with bloodless, lifeless indifference, reminding her that she would die; reminding her son that it was indifferent like everybody else; that nothing mattered, that his tenderness, his remorse, his devotion came too late; that they could not help his mother, that his mother could not feel them, did not know they were there. She had tormented her children while she lived; she would torment them while she died. She would be dragged by the

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Death Force mockingly away, just after it had allowed icy knives to slit and mutilate her body—under the hands of puppet scientists who called themselves doctors—all to no purpose.

Her past, that picture, was her son's future? No. Roland would be free. His mother had been shackled. He would love her, but she would not be there to torment him, hamper him. Free? What would he do—his music—or Daniel's politics and economics?

"Don't answer now. I know, but not now."

"Oh, Mother . . . I . . ."

But her eyes were shut; she might be sleeping. "I'll tell her to-morrow."

Roland called the night nurse and went upstairs to his room. On his bed he found Daniel, hands clasped behind his head, eyes fixed on the window. It formed a frame. Enclosed were a leaden sky, leaden roofs, leaden walls.

Dan turned round as his brother came in, and made perfunctorily as though to offer him the bed.

"It's all right. Stay there."

Neither spoke. Roland looked at the window.

"Would you like some cocoa?" he asked, getting up suddenly, dragging his eyes from the picture through the window of a leaden sky, a leaden roof, leaden walls.

"Yes, I'd love some. I'm awfully tired."

"All right, don't move. I'll put the kettle on. It won't take long."

Roland pulled down the blind, letting the ratchet run with a raucous rattle. He turned on the light,

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lit the gas fire with unpleasant noisiness, and sat down again.

"What will you do—afterwards?" asked Daniel.

"Music," replied his brother, with emphasis. "I shall compose. Teach a little, perhaps, if I've not enough to live on comfortably without. But I shall compose and play because, though I don't yet know how good I may be, it's what I feel cut out for."

"Will you do anything else?" asked Daniel feigning disinterestedness, Roland thought, rather clumsily.

"No, nothing else at all."

Roland knew what was coming, but his tenderness for his mother, the knowledge of his coming financial independence, gave him strength, or its illusion.

"I always feel," began his brother, stretching himself easefully and rucking up the bedclothes on which Roland was to sleep, "that the ideal existence would be some permanent occupation that absorbed one's emotional urges to the maximum, and some intellectual interest with it, on which to bite and keep one's curiosity in the outside world alive at the same time."

"Yes . . . though I think the permanent occupation far and away the more important." Unfocused resentment urged Roland into superlative forms of speech.

"Oh, do you? Why?" Socrates caught him up.

"Well . . ."

". . . Oh! because I do!" Roley longed to

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snap; but the nursery was nearly twenty years out of reach, and such ways were not allowed.

"Well, one can't do any good if one's always in a state of conflict, and, unless one is spending one's greatest energy doing the thing one wants to do, one always will be." Insecure, using the third person for decoy, hoping the flaws would not be seen, he stirred restively in his chair.

"Ah, but that's fallacious, you see. You may be *able* to do good only when not in conflict, that is true. But if the artistic work which resolves your conflict is going to take all your time, you'll not actually be giving any time to the doing of good at all—at least apart from the artistic work itself, which may, of course, indirectly, if one is talented enough.

"I'm not saying that it *is* desirable to do good. Do you think it is?" asked Socrates again, as an afterthought.

"I think so, probably. Not as such, I mean," added Roland hastily, watching for an expression of intellectual disapproval or cynical derision. "That is, the artistic work itself may do good."

"Do you think it matters if it does not?"

Roland twitched anxiously.

"For Heaven's sake, say which you think and I'll agree with you!" he wanted to retort. He felt in no mood for an examination into his plans for the conduct of his future life in the light of a discussion on the first principles of social and individual ethics. Surely he was entitled to exemption from logical harrying and cross-question during the strain

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of his mother's illness? But he saw the invalidity of such appeals—was not his brother just as strained, if not more? So Roland set his teeth and prepared to continue his defence against the inquisition.

"No, I don't think it matters. One's art alone is a justification in itself."

"Why? Art for Art's sake, do you mean?"

"Yes," replied the deceived victim, snatching at the slogan, which sounded reputable. Again he longed to answer: "Oh, I don't know! Don't badger me! If I want to play music because I feel alive then as with nothing else, isn't that enough? I'm going to compose and play because I *want* to. And damn the Bank Rate and cyclical fluctuations!"

But he repeated "yes, for its own sake, certainly," nervously and with defiance.

"Ah, well, *that* is an absolute wash-out. Shaw showed that up and the whole crowd of Art-for-Art's-Sakers for good and all. That won't work, not the faint-test doubt. Prove it to anybody."

"Well, what is it for, then?" asked Roland, first because he knew his brother enjoyed discoursing, and then added, to turn the Socratic tables, and because he felt he could not now endure a disquisition: "And what will you do afterwards?"

"What'll I do?" repeated his brother with a guilty start. He always betrayed acute discomposure whenever anybody employed his tactics against himself.

"Yes," Roland affirmed, thinking, "Why shouldn't I?" with grim satisfaction, a faint note of triumph in his voice. He could not resist cor-

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nering Danny, even at the price of Dan turning sulky and brutish.

"Oh, I shall go on with the Bureau and put it on a really sound footing. After that I'm not quite sure what I shall do." His voice conveyed that he was, but that as a punishment for Roland having jolted him he would not say.

"Oh," assented Roland incuriously. If Daniel felt like that, he was not going to plead to share in his plans. Besides, they had avoided the directest reference to Roland's continued co-operation in the Bureau. Roland did not want to provoke a challenge on that. He had said quite clearly what he wanted, but he had not been challenged point blank, and did not know what would have happened if he had. The sooner the conversation ended, the better. He felt on edge, frightened, resentful, unfriendly.

"Well, I think I'll go to bed, if you don't mind," he drawled, throwing in a flavouring—the merest pinch—of ironical courtesy as much as to say: Of course, if his brother did not feel inclined to vacate the bed he was at Dan's service to continue listening to his interesting discourses indefinitely.

"Right you are," said Daniel, not moving.

Why did Roland always change so, turn hostile, defensive, and bristle whenever Dan showed any interest in his ideas on life or tried to share his own with him? Dan had felt such passionate interest in Roley's intellectual development; they had developed one another so intimately, so harmoniously, yet now—what was it? Defensive and hostile—

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veiled but always the same. How could he reach him again as in the old days? This business of mother dying had been foul—true—,but so it had for all of them. Roland would probably feel the relief most.

He wanted Roland's intellectual co-operation. He wanted his emotional support. Roland could often express what Daniel was feeling, and, in particular, interpret it to others, better than his brother himself. When they did work together it was so splendid. He had tried his best not to influence Roland in his decision of whether he would continue co-operating in the Bureau after their mother was dead. Roley's future was his own. Still, he must see what a superb combination they made.

Daniel was afraid that Roland, talented though he was, would not be high enough in the first rank to make a success of music as his profession. He believed Roland would be far happier if he kept music as his recreation. For that matter it was not worth more, though he would not for a moment let his contempt and emotional ignorance of the arts escape him at this point. He had tried quite impersonally to give his younger brother the merest hint, advice as in their earliest days of growing up; trying, from stern habit ingrained in him by the insatiable questions of the clinging baby brother himself, to forestall the request for guidance which he always awaited. Did Roland think him interfering? Good God! Who had made him "interfere," devote himself to Roland's problems,

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miniature and life size, when already he was weighed down with the burdens and responsibilities of three men?

Roland was unreasonable, damned selfish! There was a limit to what brotherly love and sacrifice would endure. He was a young ass to read his personal situation into everything they discussed.

Oh, well; when mother was dead, it would be a good deal simpler for the poor lad; he was obviously in a stew now. No wonder, really, with the strain of acting, and keeping it up like that. He did it marvellously well, just the right touch—unaffected love, and all the rest of it. Anybody seeing the family for the first time would think he really enjoyed her company more than anyone else's in the world. He did do it well. Yes, and that relieved the others—Daniel himself especially—of the horrible job. Thank God, Roland was there! He was really noble. What would Daniel have done without him? What would he do—if Roley married or something? The idea of their not being together was impossible.

"He just mustn't marry, that's all! There never can have been two brothers who get on as we do, know each other's thoughts as we do."

". . . with you?" Roland's face, wooden and obstinate, looked at him from the foot of the bed.

"What? I'm sorry; didn't hear."

"I said, would you mind taking this package of papers of yours with you? They've been here for ages, and they rather clutter up the room."

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"Oh, they'll do here, won't they?"

"I'd rather you took them."

"Why?" questioned Socrates, unobservantly. Some day he would question once too often.

"They're in the way."

"What? They've been here for ages! You never said that before."

"Well, my room is used such a lot now. It's not large. You've got more room at your flat. Why can't you keep your things there?"

"Anyway, I'm sleeping here to-night. She asked me to."

"Well, then, you can take them to your own room, can't you?"

Roland's breath came in irregular gasps. What was he doing? Why could he not leave the package where it was? Perhaps a little inconvenient, but what did he need to put in its place? Nothing. All the same, it was his room. It *was* smaller than Daniel's flat. He *must* get rid of that package. It lay on the floor, untidy, dusty, the contents bulging, leering out of a gaping corner of its torn cover, a long end of string curling unsymmetrically, carelessly from the side on to the floor.

Roland had sat in ill-humoured silence while Daniel lay in self-contained contemplation on Roland's bed, dirtying the counterpane with his beastly boots, rucking up the clothes so that Roland would have to remake the whole bed before he could get to sleep comfortably for the night. Daniel lolled there, hands behind his head, oblivious to the trouble that would mean, and implying, in Roland's

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mind, that in any case trifles like that didn't worry *them*; were worth the fascinating intellectual companionship which such carefree ways of life made possible. Daniel lolled on the bed, indifferent to Roland's rights. Daniel's parcel lolled on the floor, senseless of Roland's rights. They lolled and lolled, laughing at the baby for growing so excited about a trifle.

Roland's heart rocked and banged. He must control himself, remain polite. But if that parcel was not taken away—taken away *now*, he would burst. Its contents peeped out at one corner and another; a tear in the paper let them be seen provokingly at the side. They mocked him; the curling string wriggled and chuckled at him.

Why make such a fuss? Was it hurting him? Was it really in the way? No; but Life No. 2, The Male, was taking, choking him. Another life was fighting against it. Not No. 1, The Female; that fight would soon be over, was already a thing of the past. No, it was against No. 4 now—male leadership against none, against his own life. "2 against 4, 2 against 4," he thought; "surely 4 should win. It's bigger."

"You've got more room than I have."

He was on a ship, rocking on a storm-heaving sea. Darkness all round him, creeping up to him, spreading away from him. The waters plunged, gaped, spouted, heaved. The ship under his feet rocked, shuddered, lurched. He was at the truck of the mast where the rocking of the ship was transferred and magnified. The mast quivered, bent,

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cracked. He could not move—had no support to grasp. He was set dizzy, blind, and burning, alone in a world swinging away, down, up, under his feet, the solid earth beneath the cheating waters of darkness heaving, unstable, cracking into the void. Night swam round him; the world was no more—only nausea surging in his gorge, his head, and a decision which bound him to his bending mast, and which he could not break; only a Night of Judgment: the Judge, remote, dispassionate, casting him upon the elements which his frivolity, his blasphemy, had let loose.

One figure he could see, tall, lowering, a face of stone, an enemy's. It moved; dark eyes burned him, flashed, closed. The figure turned, stooped, receded. There was light round it.

"All right, then."

"Won't you wait for the cocoa? I'm just making it."

"No, thanks."

"But I thought you wanted it?"

The light spread. Darkness went. He could see. The parcel, the lolling parcel was gone. His lolling brother was gone. Not only from his room, but from him.

Bring him back. Bring him back!

Dan! Danny!

"No, I will not call. I prefer victory. I have survived. I have won. He has gone, perhaps, but he will come back. I will bring him back. Another time, another opportunity. He will forget. But I shan't. No."

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Roland shook the mud off the counterpane. The bedclothes were rucked up so that he must remake the whole bed before he could get to sleep comfortably for the night.

IX

IT was exactly like a trick played on a cinematograph, in which a dance or a dive is run off slowly backwards. First the door seemed to open, then he heard himself say, "Come in!" and then he seemed to hear a knock. He sat up in bed, staring with intensity, summoning the mental instruments with which he supported consciousness to come to his call without delay.

"It's all over," said the nurse. She was pale and had watery eyes. An excellent nurse. Their mother liked her—no, *had* liked her.

"What? Is it? You mean No. 1? . . . Wha——? Oh no, I'm sorry, you mean? . . ."

"Yes, at half-past seven. It's a quarter to eight now."

"Was she conscious? Was she in pain?"

Roland asked—perfunctorily, because the answers must be no.

"No. Not really. Oh no." The watery eyes shifted tactfully.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, it's all right. You see, she couldn't really feel anything. You're not properly conscious when you're like that. She struggled a little at the end. They do struggle often when they're like that."

The eyes shifted again in professional reminiscence. She had had many cases such as this.

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"All right. I'll tell my brother and sisters. Won't you go and rest now, nurse? You look tired."

"Thank you, Mr. Greer, I will. The door is locked now. I shan't be here this afternoon. Er——"

"What?"

"Shall I lay her out, or——"

"Yes, please."

"I wouldn't ask in the ordinary way, but as you are Jewish, I didn't know. You see, if——"

"Yes, of course, I quite understand. Well, if you wouldn't mind doing that——"

"Oh, no, certainly. It's not a very nice thing to have to do, but we get used to it, you know."

The nurse was at her ease again. Professional etiquette was important and could be rather interesting, too. Some people think it is stupid. They don't understand. After all, there are reasons for everything, aren't there?

Roland felt as though they had been discussing whether a baby should be given an enema, and that the nurse was doing him a favour by not leaving it to a probationer. But no, they were talking, the nurse was talking, of his mother's body, her dead flesh. He half expected his mother to fling into the room, trounce the nurse smartly, and tell him he ought to be ashamed of himself.

"Oh, there was just one thing, Mr. Greer. Your mother told me she wished to be buried with her wedding ring on her finger."

"Oh, I see. All right. Thank you very much, nurse."

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He stood at the head of Daniel's bed. He, Roland, he alone possessed the news. He felt almost responsible, almost proud of the fact that his mother was dead, almost feeling that it would be his brother's duty to thank him. "First with the news," like an evening paper. Early edition. Yes, very early edition.

Should he tell him? Why should he? He must, to enjoy his power.

"Daniel . . .

"Daniel . . .

"Daniel! . . ." Softly first, then louder.

"'M, yes?'"

Roland waited deliberately until his brother should be fully awake.

"She's dead."

Daniel lay looking through the window without a movement of surprise. He stretched himself easily, clasped his hands behind his head, and yawned. Outside, framed by the window like a picture, at which both brothers stared, Roland saw the sky, a roof, walls. The sky was blue, the slate roof blinding like a mirror, the walls bright with sunlight. It was a fine morning.

"Do you know," Daniel said with quiet relish, "I've always imagined it just like this. Exactly like this. You coming into my room and waking me before breakfast, and telling me she was dead. By Jove! I am thankful, aren't you?" He was thinking of himself now. Well, why not? Very sensible. He had done as much as could be done while there was need. There was nothing more to do.

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He had no desire, it seemed, to pause for retrospect, for reflection, no awe at Death. None. What was the use? This was no surprise; they could none of them pretend to be sorry. The sooner the rest of the business was got through the better. Funerary minutiae were not exactly pleasant. He was put off by Death, certainly; but awed, no.

"Of course he's not," thought Roland; "still, he doesn't know 'she struggled.' Though he might not be even then. Struggling is nothing wonderful. They do often when they're like that."

"Like what?" he wondered suddenly. "When they're dying, I suppose. But 'they'? This was my mother. This has only happened once. There is no 'they.'"

It was Saturday. Roland had to deliver the death certificate to the cemetery rabbi's office before two o'clock. It was in the City in some Lane, of which no policeman he could find had ever heard. He ran from one Lane to the next, down and across the narrow, clean, dead streets where the offices in which his mother's investments—his investments—were registered, stood in fine buildings with rubber carpets.

It was five minutes to two. Roland ran slowly, out of breath, clutching the blue death certificate in his hand. The death certificate—his mother's death certificate—fluttered in the silent avenues of stone. The share certificates, his share certificates, lay smooth, uncreased, in haughty, hard security behind the walls which formed the avenues of stone,

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and which stared dumbly, sardonically, down upon the human runner.

No petty peddling within their proud precincts. "Old certificates for new," eh? Yes, he had better run, the sharemongering Jew; the sooner he got rid of the one the sooner he would get hold of the others. It was blue, the certificate in his hand. She had turned blue. Were share certificates blue?

A scarlet bus bowled past him, a blind, rumbling ogre. He must reach the office by two, or it would be shut. Then his mother would have to wait to be buried till Tuesday. How angry she would be, how insulted. She would have special arrangements made and send for the manager. She would give them a piece of her mind. It was perfectly disgraceful, even if it were late. How dared they propose that she should not be buried! How could she get there before? She had only just died! Idiots! English fools! Liars and fools! Make out the paper this instant!

And how tetchy Uncles Myer and Freddie would be too!

A sleek, unconsciously Semitic-looking clerk received him, received the blue certificate, reassured him, bowed him out. It was barely *comme il faut* to transact business, even such business, on Shabbos.

He walked back through the avenues of stone, the brass nameplates on their prosperous, absent occupiers winking, with silent amusement. Was he downhearted? Was he pretending to be sad? But think of the share certificates! They were his

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now! The polished plates glistened sarcastically, like Daniel in a bad humour, grinned brazenly, yelled with laughter. He was sad? Oppressed? Ha! Ha! A fine joke for a Sabbath morning. Well, well, they would let him off; he could go now. He would come again soon—for his share certificates.

He emerged into the open space by the Mansion House. They stopped their false, filthy jeers. He was alone again

She had forbidden anyone to wear black. On the way to the Jewish cemetery in Willesden the two brothers had to stop for Daniel to be shaved. He had overslept that morning, and now they could not find the way.

It was a horrid business, this burying. The relations would be there, he supposed, although only a few probably.

"It will be a hole-and-corner affair," Daniel had expected, hiding his feeling of an insult under cynical amusement. "How furious Myra would have been! Can't you just see her biting Uncle Myer's head off and boxing Lia on the ears when we got back because not enough carriages had been ordered, or rather, too many, which would be even more insulting!" He and Roland laughed at the picture. Still, Daniel felt piqued, though he did hide it behind cynical amusement.

The barber's shop was full; the barber, a Jew, was slow. Daniel lost his temper; remarked spitefully, childishly about Jews; tried to drag Roland on to his side of the bickering.

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"Well, aren't you a Jew, too?" the barber inquired noisily. "Gow on, of course you are. Why, ye're both Jews! Anyone can see that!"

Daniel, who had put himself in the wrong, felt this too was an insult. Roland, who had done nothing, did not. His elder brother glowered just as his mother used when suffering public discomfiture. Roland went outside to inquire the way.

They were in time. They entered—there were half a dozen of them—a bare stone room. There she was. In a black box, with a horrible, evocative widening a quarter the way down the sides to allow room for the shoulders.

She was on a porter's hand-cart. Hebrew nasal noises, Hebrew guttural noises. Impressive nonsense, picturesque poetry, with the English on the opposite page in case one couldn't understand.

". . . May she come to her place in peace. He remembereth that we are dust."

Navvies, plain, ordinary, corduroyed navvies, half unselfconsciously, for the rest making primitive yet adequate attempts to look reverent and polite, had gripped her with earthy hands by the black japanned metal handles—like those on Roland's school play-box (which he still had)—and swung her down. How heavy for a small woman! At the moment of physical strain their expressions lost their reverence, politeness; a weight was a weight no'ow, wasn't it, Mister? And they'd got to lift it some'ow, 'adn't they, Mister? like any other weight. Well, there it was, they couldn't spill it, could they, Mister? The only way to prevent that was to hold your

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legs well apart and swing it off the cart slowly, careful-like, on to the slings.

There they all stood, a crocodile of mourners, summoning crocodile tears of tribute, waiting for that oaf Daniel to take the spade.

"Go on, you fool! Throw some earth on!" muttered Roland over his brother's shoulder. The nearest of kin first, the second nearest next, and so on. (So Daniel was nearest of kin, was he?)

"N-no," Dan stuttered in a plaintive, uncomfortable whisper. "That's not it."

"Yes, it is. Look!" Roland nudged him angrily.

"Ah! my fine bird! My clever, intellectual, logical fool. So you are at a loss, are you? You actually have no idea what you ought to do? That's curious. Perhaps it's what the psychologists call 'resistance'? You won't believe your younger brother, won't you? Make a fool of yourself, then! In front of dear Freddie and Myer, too!"

Again the stone mask against public discomfiture covered Daniel's face. Barbarous, disgusting, useless custom! Why had he ever come to the beastly funeral? Cynicism, yes; but horrors, gruesome details, no! It was like picking up his mother's corpse by a leg and dropping it on to a morgue in front of the populace. They needn't take his disgust for awe, though! Their idiotic customs and jibbering mumbo-jumbo!

Roland grasped the handle, misjudged the weight of wet earth, and heaved the full blade out of the mound. Incongruous effort!

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"My dear man, what do you think you're doing? You're not supposed to bury her!"

Ridiculous truth! At least, not *intended* to; *supposed* to was exactly what he was. To tumble callous stones on her face, darken with London dirt her mutilated body? That was reverent, the sign of filial piety, amends? So his people said; so they had done the last five thousand years. But the other black-coated vertebræ of the crocodile did not seem to see her face; they only fiddled with the spade phlegmatically, unimpressed, polite, forgiving the common workman as it were the bad taste of his intrusion and the presumption of his proximity to their upper-class persons because his brawn was indispensable. They brushed their grey gloves delicately, quietly, politely, and sauntered, still in crocodile, in ruminating nonchalance, first to polish off their formal homage in the stone room and then to relax and spin smoothly away in their waiting motor-cars.

But in the stone house, undecorated, like a roomy cell, the rabbi motioned, nearly pushed, the two nearest of kin down on to the bench against the wall, and gobbled over them Hebrew nasal noises, Hebrew guttural noises. The tail of the crocodile relaxed its attitude of military "attention"; its members turned and looked at the nearest of kin over their shoulders, their Jewish cheeks hanging yellow, thick and chubby, as their heads tilted with improper lack of ceremony over their high starched collars. The nearest of kin sat like schoolboys being admonished, gazing self-consciously at that part of

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the rabbi's person which was on a level with their eyes.

He stopped. He shook hands. He pottered among the mourners lavishing his professional, almost professorial dignity. He had been paid. And he was common. The nearest of kin did not enjoy shaking hands. Their mother would have disapproved, and glowered even more flushinglly than Daniel. How dare they send a common person! She had paid for a proper service and expected to be properly served. And those disgusting navvies—common English brutes! How dared they? Cheats and thieves! She would teach them! She would send for the manager about it and give him a piece of her mind!

Soundlessly the nearest of kin groaned.

"Oh, it was a hole-and-corner affair! Only about two people there besides ourselves. How insulted Myra would have been! Can't you just see her biting Uncle Myer's head off because the rabbi was so 'impossibly common, my dear'!" Daniel and Roland laughed at the picture. In bitter ill-humour, Daniel squeezed the story dry, amplifying his account with sardonic jests, to bait Alexia in her silly, sentimental squeamishness. The religious fool! She'd been to pray while he and Roland were at the funeral! And then she wanted to borrow twenty pounds on her legacy before Amen was out of her mouth. Sentimental hypocrite! To hell with her! He'd never see her again if he could help it! Would Roland? Not he, if he could help it.

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The survivors of the family broke up and separated. No more did the common enemy, the tyrant, bind them to one another. She was in a box with half a ton of mud on top of her. They were free at last. No. 1, The Female, was buried.

PART III
CAME

I

A YOUNG man leaned out of the window in a taxi as it was slackening its pace, and said in a firm voice to an old man panting along just outside:

"You are not wanted, thank you; will you please go away."

Since the runner continued to follow without taking any notice of this request, the young man, who looked about twenty-four years old, put his head out and repeated it.

Roland Greer put one hand on his companion's knee and the other on the edge of the window, leaning forward to give his words the necessary sternness and to see better through the darkness whether the wretched workless creature was giving up his pursuit. Roland was not performing this kindly act by inclination, but because he was frightened of a woman, who was sitting next to him. She was not his mother. She was his mistress.

She did not really mind if the beggar carried in their luggage, but she told Roland she would rather not because that was what he seemed to want. In despair to understand his thoughts, powerless, like a rabbit surrounded by stoats, to act on natural impulse, she said, fatalistically, what was expected of her.

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"Huh!" thought Roland. "Just like her! Mother all over again!"

But he disguised (so he thought) his true feelings, and, turning to Juliette as he sat back, said, "My mother would never let them do it, either, you know—Dan and I always had to get rid of them. It's funny, isn't it, but I find myself even now thinking instinctively I should send them away. Yet I don't really mind in the least! I always find too that I use the old phrases. How pleased Myra would be at her lasting influence over me! But there's not much humour in it for the wretched runner. I thought you might not like him to take your dressing-case; that's why I asked you just then. Was I wrong?"

"No," replied Juliette, shaking her head slowly in the darkness, where Roland could not see, and disguising (so she thought) her true feelings.

She dragged joylessly up the stairs and into Roland's flat, a charming flat, and spacious—two floors—which he had taken soon after his mother's death. With the legacy left him while at Oxford and the money he had inherited from her, he was no longer poor. On the contrary, he was fairly marriageable.

What mattered dirty or dishonest fingers to Juliette now? Roland was fleeing from her, had, she knew, already in his heart. All the external aids to make love's course run smoothly, which he had lavished money to provide; all the props his failing passion had secretly leaned upon, subtly contrived; the crutches which his hobbled desire had so obvi-

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ously, so pathetically, so feverishly, snatched; all, all, all had been useless. Yet still he continued like a silly ant piling up pretences which deceived neither of them, and which each knew did not deceive the other.

She realised now that, first quite unconsciously, then less and less so, unable to face something in himself which she (and he) did not understand, and which, apparently, whenever she moved an inch towards it, she only made worse, Roland had been dishonest with her and with himself almost from the start. What was it that tripped him, that made him wound her, look at her, speak to her, mock-embrace her, as though she were another person, not herself?

He had talked about his mother more times than she could remember; always she understood him up to a point, never beyond. His suffering when a child, his longing to be free, his isolation, his inability to believe anyone could feel love for him coupled with his longing for it, his sensitive preparedness for treachery and tricks—yes, she could understand these. But his *obsession* with the memories of his mother's ways till he made them live for him and made Juliette their vehicle; his idiotic, obstinate distrust of her, and fits of cold deceit—pretending he wanted to kiss her when he did not and she had never asked him—; his withering when she lavished love; these she could not understand, came to dread, hate him for, and then, seeing him drift, pity him for, and watch covertly and with an anxious heart. She knew about his prostitute, knew

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about his shop girl; but surely his feelings for the first woman he loved, possessed, was loved by, need not fade because of them?

She had liked him when they met, let him take her, with his self-deceiving, gallant assurances of love, before she loved him. Rash for a married woman, and rasher still with a man who paused between their embraces to explain nervously that, though his income was this, and his expectations that, he did not intend to marry her, or marry at all. She had lived to be thankful for that comic outburst of frankness, in however odd taste, and to lament it as the first and last example of unguarded candour. She had woken to her love for him with helpless gaze, and here they were, her lover at the end of the road, his mistress at the start.

Roland's watery courage had made him lie, procrastinate, evade. How many times had he not plunged and drawn back, till the mere thought that he must meet her flung him into a helpless turmoil? No; he could not go on. He did not love her. He did not hate her, that is, her, Juliette Paton, Lawley Paton's wife—it was someone else he hated. Yet he dreaded Juliette, felt guilt because he did not love her.

The irony made him groan, made her tremble; he had longed for her to love him and, when she did, longed to hear her say so. Forcing herself to the edge of a precipice, she had muttered the words with her face buried at his side where he could not see her. Why did men demand the last ounce of flesh and blood? She gave her body, her love,

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betrayed her husband. What other proof did he need? No, he must hear it from her lips: "I love you."

From that moment her Pandora lips brought misery and darkness to them both; from that moment he hated her. His mistress's body, spirit, mind had, he felt at calm and lucid moments in her absence, nothing really to do with it. He was tilting at a ghost, which stepped tauntingly between them, fitted her outline, eluded and deluded him so perfectly that he ran at her. It was his mother.

He perceived it clearly, turned it over and over in his mind, explained it calmly, scientifically to Juliette, and she listened meekly. But what good was that to her? What good to him? He seemed unable to lay this ghost even when he recognised it.

He reflected again; vowed to himself that he would banish it; explained it again more calmly, more scientifically to his mistress. To no avail. They could not go on.

Roland had exhausted other reasons, not the true ones, which had served for a time: the dread of a baby, of Lawley finding out. Real dangers, yet they were not what made Roland long to leave her, and he knew it—at last. In spite of his dispassionate analysis of his emotional impotence, he grew more confused except about one thing: he must leave her.

Yet why? Why? Why?

He asked himself that unhappy question, and found no answer. Juliette, his darling Juliette, his soft and lovely love, was as unlike his mother as

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anybody could be. His mother had been short, ungraceful, dark, with black eyes and flushed face. Juliette was tall and supple and had auburn hair, real auburn. Her skin was white as cream, her eyes blue, and her cheeks of a fantastic milk and roses. Then why? Why must he shun her? Why was his chest pressed by an iron band when now they met? She fulfilled—had fulfilled—every condition he desired. Then why?

Staring through the window at the eternal London picture—a leaden sky, a leaden roof, a leaden wall—she sat with dilated eyes, panting. He had told her it was the end. She had known it—how many months before he said so; how many years did it seem now? Yet the shock was like waking after an accident and being told that he was dead.

Not true. Not true. . . . She would walk up to the clock, push with her own fingers its hands two minutes backwards, and tell Time that, those two minutes traced again her way, the way which everybody knew was true, He might go forward. She would wind that doll up again, move its jaws and tongue very carefully, very gently, with her own hands, and make it say the words it ought to say, make it obliterate that senseless grating noise which it had wickedly, like a witless parrot, set vibrating on a path down the avenues of irreversible eternity.

Daniel had tried genuinely to help Roland. He had perceived Roland's restlessness, unhappiness, conflict. He had thought over the problem, dis-

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cussed it with his wife, tried to hint to Roland, behind cynical jokes and advice, that his elder brother, his friend, who had helped him out of so many difficulties in the past, was at his service now.

But this attitude was an embarrassment, for Daniel was ignorant the while that Roland even knew Juliette. Dan and Eileen had met her several times in one of those London circles which envious outsiders delight to term a "clique," but which its languid members more often call a "crowd." Here, too, later she in fact met Roland.

But while Roland was already struggling to leave her Daniel was suggesting to his wife that she had better set about finding Roland some obliging girl—an artist, or actress, or somebody of the sort—among the Bloomsbury crowd whom they so often met.

"Widows are supposed to be very easy to get off with because they are so ardent," he said coolly, reflecting in his logical way over every type of possibility. "And then, of course, there's always Leicester Square, though . . ."

Roland agreed, implying gratuitously that, besides, this did not attract him.

But "Don't interfere!" Roland complained silently. "It's my sexual life, not yours! Leave me alone!"

And when one evening Dan greeted him with roars of laughter, explaining how he had had a dream the night before that he was enjoying some lady's favours on Roland's behalf, as his investigator,

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so to speak, and agent, Roland joined in with only the insincere laughter of an elderly cuckold.

"A new form of *droit de Seigneur*," he tittered, embellishing the diverting picture, much to his brother's delight. But "a little *too* kind," he thought, and was thankful that he knew his Freud.

Roland's diffidence with Juliette was never disturbed by jealousy. Nevertheless, he avoided talking to her much about his brother.

He told her a little sometimes about incidents like Dan's dream, and his own sullen resentment, but this seemed like putting a weapon into her hands—for what, he could not have explained—as well as being disloyal to Daniel.

When things began to go ill with Juliette and himself, Roland noticed, or thought he noticed, that she grew at least not averse to pricking him, tweaking him, gently, coolly, with the little thorns of discord between him and Dan. Her attacks could hardly be called attacks; they were like the tiny pretty plashings of a baby wave as it crumbles harmlessly the edge of a glassy sea and trickles, with dying impetus, round a child's castle in the sand. Her attacks were always disguised: harmless descriptions of what Daniel said to her when she met him last, how he seemed to admire her, how she slightly disliked him.

Roland was baffled. He felt jealous of his brother's admiration of Juliette, yet hated her for disliking Daniel. No one was allowed to do that except himself, and he only disliked Dan, if as much, at moments. Yet admittedly she sought out un-

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pleasant qualities in Daniel simply to please Roland. But that did not console him; no attitude—and this she failed altogether, so it seemed, to understand—no attitude she could devise, however subtle an admixture of positive and negative, would ever satisfy him. He wanted her never to meet Daniel, only to listen without comment to Roland talking about him.

But, like a wasp to honey, impelled vaguely by an impulse for retaliation, Juliette returned tactlessly, not once, but over and over again, to this tender region of Roland's feelings. This little sore, kept carefully, if unconsciously, open by them both, added to Roland's growing uneasiness of mind. It did nothing to make his relations with Juliette easier, and made her as jealous of the domination over his thoughts held by his relations with Daniel as it did Roland of Daniel's alleged admiration for his brother's mistress.

Here were still two people of whom he was afraid, whom he loved and hated at the same time, who were still, as they had always been, one woman and one man.

That they did not, so far as their "possession" of him was concerned, know each other, at least that the man did not know the woman was struggling for him, though the woman knew, divined, the man was, did not alter for Roland the fundamental characteristics of this eternal triangle. Always a woman and a man—Janet and Daniel, his mother and Daniel, Juliette and Daniel. Janet had lost, his mother had lost, Juliette had lost. They

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were all gone, or going. Who, what, would be left?

No wonder Roland told neither Dan nor Eileen about Juliette at the first. Dan had been right unwittingly in prophecy, if less so in advice; the "high-brow crowd" had produced a mistress. True, she was neither artist nor actress; but a singer matched Roland's temperament and interests still better. Nor was she a widow; but a married woman might be just as ardent, and the situation even more piquant.

It was only later that Roland took Eileen, and her alone in a direct way, into his full confidence; nor, as things had turned out, was he sorry. But Eileen's discomfort when he first hinted that his love was breaking was clear enough, and her advice, as anybody's must have been, almost useless. Yet Daniel's discomfort would have embarrassed even more, and his advice have been superfluous beyond words. Plenty would have been forthcoming, but cold; and intellectually, scientifically, psychologically flawless to the point of ingenuity; emotionally dead. No, that avenue of help was closed.

There Roland sat, his passion burnt out, Juliette staring, round-eyed, like an electrocuted corpse, through the window at the eternal London picture—a leaden sky, a leaden roof, a leaden wall. The dregs of their secret "honeymoon," their trial of love in a cottage, lay on their tongues like ashes. She had known always during those few weeks, as Roland knew she knew, just when he was feeling distant, cold, hostile. Then she would turn and

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face him, drop her hands at arm's length upon his shoulders, and say tremulously, the tears welling into her miserable eyes, "What is it, darling; tell me, what's the matter? What have I done?"

"Nothing," he would reply brusquely, "nothing's the matter. You've not done anything." And she would turn away, heaving hopeless sighs, and trying to conceal them.

She suddenly dropped his hand like a burning coal, one day when they were walking, and asked, "What is it? You are miles from me!"

He pretended not to understand, then protested it was not true, then gently took her hand again in silence, and let her guess the worst.

And now she had said, "But you can't leave me! You *can't!*" with dreadful incredulity that made him quail.

He thought, "But I can—and do." But he sat dumb and shook his head dolefully. He felt less than she, and forced himself to look solemn and sad; felt hypocritical as though baring his head to let a stranger's funeral go by. He had hoped she would take it lightly, knowing she would not. He had set himself to make her love him with a frivolity that now appalled him, and then, like any cruel and heartless villain in a melodrama, "thrown her love away."

He supposed he was cruel. She must think him fiendishly cruel; and yet he had gritted his teeth and forced himself to try one more time, more times than he cared to remember. He too had suffered; he could not help her suffering now. The sooner

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it was over the better for them both. So he reassured himself.

He sat there, his passion burnt out, two broken hearts to his credit, his own not one of them.

He envied Juliette her power of love. He felt incapable of loving anyone. Yet he loved one person—his brother. But that love was so strong, so much part of his being alive, that he did not feel it as a compact experience which he could dip into, devote himself to in his leisure hours, as he chose or not.

His love for women had never gone beyond that, except at rare, brief moments in the melting of his passion. Then he had felt an intense desire to dominate, subdue, possess, adjacent to a longing to be cradled by soft breasts and cool arms, with eyes bending over, low and near, and hair, smelling, simply, like his mistress's hair, grazing soothingly his cheeks. He had wanted, and had, primitive, violent bodily victories, and maternal, gentle loving-kindness. But these, though at the time they seemed more intense than human frame and nerves could endure, had been crests of waves, moments. He had never felt for a woman complete, enduring, reckless, selfless love, never been bound to a woman by chains, never felt listless, stupid, numb, when she had gone away, or frowned upon him. Shocks he had had from women, truly; sacrifices accepted without notice; his sensibilities callously ignored. Such things had hurt.

But he had never met any woman whose absence made him feel that he lived only when she lived, that her joys, triumphs, misfortunes, were his joys

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too. Yet all these things he felt about Dan; still did. He still did. All his emotional energy seemed drained into that one vessel so that he had few feelings left for anybody or anything else.

So he stared at Juliette, who stared through the window, and he shook his head uselessly, and raised his eyebrows wistfully, and sighed.

He knelt on the floor and tried to kiss her hand; she withdrew it brutally without remark. He muttered, "Darling, I'm so sorry, so dreadfully sorry," and she replied in a ringing voice, "It's no use being sorry—that won't help! I'd better go."

He felt so much relieved that he began to wonder whether he had not made a mistake; but when she still did not move, he knew again that he had not. He felt ashamed, he felt he was committing murder. But he let her go, and went and sat down in the chair where she had sat, and stared through the window at that eternal London picture—a leaden sky, a leaden roof, a leaden wall.

"What is left?"

"Nothing."

Unless, maybe, his music; that had not been for him everything that he had hoped, but who could tell what the future held?

"Who is left?"

"No one."

Unless maybe his brother. He had not been for him everything that he had hoped, but who could tell what the future held?

Which Life would have him in the end? He had believed No. 1, The Female, dead, so many

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times, he could believe it confidently no longer just because their mother was dead too. No. *I* must be immortal.

"In that case," reflected Roland, "thank God that I'm not! Though if dying is half so unpleasant as living, thank God again that man can die but once!"

On that he fell asleep.

He dreamed that he had married Juliette, although she was still the wife of Lawley; but that her husband died just as Roland was about to be arrested for bigamy. Then Juliette said: "Yes, I've blue eyes and auburn hair. Now, wouldn't you far sooner have a small, beautiful wife with black eyes and black hair? I'm sure you would!"

"No! Of course I wouldn't!" Roland shouted, finding himself, for some reason, in a cot.

But, as happens so often in dreams, though he shouted with all his energy, only a little whisper emerged. Juliette apparently could not hear even that, for she laughed in his face and said, "Silence means consent, you know!"

He shouted again, or tried to, but nobody took the least notice. Only he heard an echo, which turned into a roar—" . . . Oo, no! No!" He determined frantically he would convince his wife that he loved her just as she was, and struggled to embrace her like a husband. As he did so, she changed into his mother, and Roland woke up with beating heart, saying: "And I *do* love you!"

But when he heard his words and tried to understand their meaning, he forgot his dream, and his heart soon beat normally again.

II

IN spite of himself Roland was driven by habit to bring his troubles, sooner or later, even if but a retrospect, to Eileen and, through her, to Dan.

Feeling he could not ask her to keep secrets from her husband, Roland put off confiding in her as long as possible, but when he could no longer bear his spiritual solitude, told her everything and left it to her to pass on what she chose to Danny.

When his burlesque idyll with Juliette was over, he poured out his woes to Eileen in a lengthy letter.

"I don't know exactly why I tell you about all this, Eileen darling," he wrote, "except that it seems natural to me always to tell you everything. I'm afraid it may revolt you—it is so sordid. Read it, you and Danny, at your leisure, but don't leave it about!

"Love, R."

"P.S.—Any advice thankfully received!"

Roland always held it was just because Eileen was his brother's wife—the nearest approach among women to a pure companion—that he found it so easy to talk to her. He felt no embarrassment at revealing to her his sexual life and troubles—on the contrary, some relief, even a little pleasure—, yet he had felt she might like him less for it, and foresaw that she would not be articulate enough in her

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attempts to reassure him that it made no difference to her feelings for him. Whenever a man demanded sympathy, in spite of herself she became dried up and dumb.

Roland was right from wrong reasons in his fear that she would be inarticulate.

"Have you read my effusion yet?" he asked when he met her, after waiting in vain for her to broach the subject. He was beginning to think resentfully that, after all, his affectionate sister-in-law was indifferent to his well-being; he missed, in his self-absorption, her involuntary reaction of embarrassment.

"Yes, Ro darling, we both have. Dan wants to keep it. He thinks it may be a very valuable document, psychologically."

So that was the sum total of her help, her sympathy, her understanding—*Daniel* thought?

Damn Daniel's stony sociology, psychology, or whatever it was!

Roland wanted warm personal concern, not second-hand scientific commendation. He preened himself inwardly, as he always did, at the touch of his brother's praise, but that did not ease his aching.

He remembered how he had burned, rooted to the spot, when two days after her honeymoon (his brother had suggested—just like his mad ideas—that Janet and Roley should go with them) his sister-in-law had announced that she must kiss him. And she had, her husband looking on with fond assent, and Roland had tingled, and longed to kiss

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her back, but thought she would not like it. But he did a great deal later on. Calf-love, he supposed, on reflection. Anyway, he was her devoted slave; and more than ever looked upon marriage for him as ridiculous and—spiritually at least—superfluous.

He wanted her now, even in the middle of Hyde Park, to put her arms round his neck, ruffle his hair, press his head against her breast and rock him gently. He wanted her lips to kiss him comfortingly on the forehead, and to hear her say, "There, there, there! There, there!" as his mother used to do when he was six years old, and fell over and bumped his head. He wanted Eileen to be a mother to him. But his mother was dead, and he remembered her now only as an unapproachable prude, grey, growing old. Eileen was young, beautiful, with limpid level eyes, easy without parallel to get on with. But she was not his mother; she was Daniel's wife; and she "thought his description very good," and Daniel believed it might be "a valuable psychological document." Roland sighed sadly. He had hoped for more from them both.

In spite of his habit of taking his troubles to Daniel, in spite of Daniel's theoretical approval of free love, and what might be called his liberal advice, Roland felt unsympathetic over all sexual matters, except the comic. More, he felt very nearly, and sometimes with inexplicable ferocity, antagonistic. He presumed this was because Daniel did not understand his secret difficulties, had no common experience. As nearly always when judging his brother, and trying to guess what was his experience

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in matters of the world beyond the confined immaterial area of their simplest mutual feelings, Roland was wrong. It was because Daniel understood too well what his younger brother's difficulties were; because they were his own too, though he overleapt them by a *tour de force*—a method which cannot be imparted; it was for these reasons that he felt, and made Roland feel, ill at ease, and that they never felt sympathetic to each other.

Quite unsympathetically, Roland discerned Daniel's indiscriminating subjection to a sense of duty. Daniel felt positively that he had failed in his duty—to whom, he was not clear; "God or somebody"—if he did not solve every difficulty of Roland's for him. Dan had always "stood by" when they were all children, too young to defend themselves against their mother, and now, as ever, he felt that he must turn his own experiences to account, in fact seek experiences to turn to account, for the sake of his brother and sisters, above all his brother.

For this sympathy, this help, Roland noted perfunctorily, he was extremely grateful. But below this sympathy he saw, without clearly recognising it, antipathy, even prudery. He felt that his brother's affected contempt for their mother was ill-founded, that there was less difference between them than Daniel seemed to imagine, and that Daniel could approach no nearer to true, fully sympathetic, emotional understanding of Roland's unhappiness and difficulties than had their mother.

His mother had inhibited him absolutely from

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loving a woman, though she pestered him to marry. His brother inhibited him from marrying, though he pestered him to taste. His mother would have fainted at the thought of him free-loving, fought against it like the Fiend; his brother urged him to repeatedly, then showed dislike for it when he had done so.

Both Myra and Daniel shied at the problem; and swerved, one to one side—romanticism—the other to the other side—cynicism—from the straight path of realism. Roland's mother, who would never have admitted that her romanticism led nowhere, and who had hidden its failure behind the calamity—or mercy—of her marriage not lasting long enough to put it to the sternest test—his mother had urged him to follow in her romantic footsteps, the footsteps of her generation, nice, easy, commendable footsteps, and to marry and live happily ever after. Daniel—he who led them all when adolescents in holding marriage up to ridicule and was the first of them, the only one of them, to marry—urged Roland not to marry, but, sipping his disillusion gently, to take his pleasure freely and have the best of both worlds as a bachelor. Daniel projected and urged upon Roland the qualities which he obscurely knew he himself lacked, and satisfied his craving to compensate his lack by preaching to Roland to adopt the attitude which had been beyond Daniel's power, but which he was soothed by fancying he practised.

To ignore his mother's advice, silly rubbish, had been simple, but to find a satisfactory reason for

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not following his brother's Roland found a puzzle. Though his reluctance to follow advice from someone who had not truly solved his own problem was sound enough, he did not understand on an intellectual plane to what his confusion in this matter was due. He only thought, "Dan always interferes," and it was true; but so did Daniel help. Daniel thought, "He always leans on me," and it was true; but so did Roland try to free himself.

Each pointed to only one of the motives in the other and sneered that that was all, bringing their fate a little nearer, knowing they harmed themselves as well as each other, because they knew—however obscurely—that their truth had been a half truth, which is a lie.

But their endurance was not endless, and passion stepped in greedily where reason fainted; and to sate passion, however petty, however self-destructive, was, when one particular moment came, a more imperative need than rational, far-sighted, safety-seeking moderation. So each gave himself up hungrily to the lust of thinking bad and hate about the other, and killed the truth and wisdom that were in him.

Daniel's attitude of railing with particularly crude savagery against their mother, and laughing at her after she was dead, incensed Roland and, more than he wished, induced him to defend her actions. These were comprehensible, for her inhibitions had been painfully evident. His brother had inhibitions, too, had he not? Why could he not understand his mother's disadvantages?

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At the mention of his having inhibitions—by proclaiming such a severe standard of rationality he rendered himself peculiarly vulnerable—Daniel's face turned to granite, he became sour and unsociable, and he refused to utter another word the rest of the evening. Roland's heart sank, then hardened. He downright hated his brother when he behaved like that. Their mother had always accused Daniel of being intolerably touchy, and she was right. Roland loved his mother at that moment; felt her anyway to be a bulwark. Daniel discerned this and bore her all the greater grudge for it. So the tug-of-war between him and their mother's ghost was pulled more venomously, and as ceaselessly as ever, and as if Roland's triangle were not unhappy enough, this sexual tangle was ravelled round it.

The brothers drew no nearer; an undercurrent of distrust was set flowing; and a subterranean tension was created, which could slacken and spring taut without a warning.

III

LIFE was taking such a different course from what Roland had expected. Happiness with his brother, love with his mistress, growing absorption and success in his music, these had seemed the inevitable, the only, prospects.

Yet his music was not even now his real work—Roland had never, in spite of his over-hasty intention as declared that night before his mother's death, left the Bureau after all.

"Well, it'll smash, of course, if he does clear out now," Eileen reported Daniel as saying; and Roland blushed at his shabby intention to abandon his brother in such need, to reject so meanly the most decisive opportunity of showing gratitude for all Dan's love and sacrifices of their childhood's years, when Roland had had such need of him.

"But of course not!" Roland declared, with affected surprise that Daniel could have mistaken any casual remark of his about the distant, quite distant, future, in such an idiotic way; he would not leave the Bureau till Dan was really established, and financially safe.

Knowing he protested too much, recoiling in horror before the responsibility of causing more anxiety, unhappiness, and perhaps poverty to his sister-in-law, her limpid, level eyes piercing him with remorse and overcoming him with shame at

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his ever having dreamed of leaving her in the lurch, Roland bound himself more securely than ever to the hateful, irresponsible undertaking to work for his brother till it was safe to leave him. But even as he spoke, Roland felt his unwillingness leaking from his eyes; and so strongly in his own mind did this qualify what he said that he came later, in looking back, to regard it as indisputable that he had never really pledged himself at all. So fierce was the silent inner conflict that both sides of it survived equally vividly in memory, and, when he was taxed with inconsistency or forgetfulness, he wanted to laugh in his accuser's lying face!

Inconsistent! As if he could forget!

No, he did not forget what had passed in his mind, but he did forget how much had ever been visible, or communicated outside.

With an income of his own, Roland received less scrupulous attention from his brother in the matter of any sums due, and Daniel always seemed to expect the safety point for Tiber to be reached somewhere in about a year or two's time.

"Oh, two years at the very outside, I should put it at," he said with lordly reassurance; and he congratulated himself innocently on keeping his promise clearly in view, when, two or three months later, the subject having turned up again, he repeated nobly, "Oh, two years at the very outside, I can undertake that."

Roland ground his teeth, but went on with the work. His brother's easy self-deception, the impossibility of dragging Eileen into a dispute, though

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she alone might have solved the problem at the cost of a quarrel with her husband, gnawed at Roland's peace of mind and worked itself like sand in a machine into his whole mental life.

Was he to be a junior assistant to his brother for ever? Gratitude had its limits, but Daniel exploited it to the last atom. Still, if Daniel exploited his brother, his brother offered himself for exploitation.

Then, hating himself for his weakness, incapable of facing his fatal willingness to prostitute himself, Roland hid his self-contempt under pettish hate, and blame of his brother's selfishness.

So Roland's music remained, as his brother had advised, a recreation, an emotional valve; and the "growing absorption and success" remained in the future.

The valve was worked hard and could not but weaken in its functioning, and the emotional burdens with which music became charged hindered Roland from making technical progress or ever deriving such full emotional relief and comfort from it as he had expected. Discontent, a gloomy view about his talent, fell upon him, and he began both to have less recourse to music for consolation, and at the same time to force more out of it than it could possibly give.

"Happiness with his brother"? Nor had "happiness with his brother" deepened. Indeed, the less said, the less thought, about that, the better.

Finally, then "love with his mistress"? The less said, the less thought, about that too, the better.

But both these resolutions were easier to form

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than to keep. Roland began to reconsider them from the beginning and to doubt their wisdom and their value. What was the use of suppressing truths? It only meant flying from them. All enlightened psychology showed that it was positively harmful. But enlightened psychology went on to say that instead, *instead*, one should face one's difficulties, probe them to the bottom, and, taking courage, follow the dictates of one's new-found being.

The first instruction was easier to follow than the last; Roland felt that he had little courage to take. And how probe? Was everything not plain? First, his mother had exploited him and his childish love for her; next, his brother. No one denied that it was hard to refuse things to somebody whom one loved.

Still, his mother had been dead two years; things should be easier. He could do what he liked, love whom he liked.

Roland was puzzled, irked: the burden had re-descended, not vanished; the conflict was growing barer, sterner, not dissolving.

The true adversaries began to emerge, the real enmity revealed itself in unexpected ways at unexpected moments. It pressed up the lid of his unconscious mind, tapping softly, distinctly, ever more firmly. It prized the lid open and slid up into his conscious mind, circling, buzzing, ominously round and round like a bee in a glass cage.

It gave him less and less rest; intruded into more and more incidents; hung in wait to upset all his decisions, to spoil his pleasant plans, his

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cowardly, shirking dreams. It knocked more loudly in its prison; it ground its way in his ears, his brain, his heart. It sucked his blood in his most courageous moments, it caved in his stomach at crises, twitched his nerves, knocked on the door of his thoughts, knocked and knocked and knocked.

He could not escape; he could not shut his eyes nor block his ears; he could not soothe his nerves nor calm his heart. He knew, he was always knowing, the one real truth; he knew at last, twist and wriggle from it as he might, what was the real, the cleaving, the paralysing enmity, the conflict which must crush or be crushed, destroy, annihilate, or be purified, burned out.

The battle had not been between his mother and himself, nor was it between her ghost and him; it was not even between his mother or her ghost and Daniel. It was between Daniel and himself, him and his brother.

The horror did not dawn upon Roland imperceptibly; it recurred, like a patch working loose on a rubber-tyred wheel.

Remarks, ideas of his brother's, which before seemed witty, profound, fine, now struck Roland as laboured, and tasteless, superficial, narrow, and brutal. Admiration turned to contempt, willingness to reluctance, and every other feeling to its opposite. Except one thing—fear did not turn to courage; and one fact too remained unchanged—Roland still followed his brother's domination, still acted, still lived, under his juggernaut personality.

But, though Roland came to know what were his

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true feelings for his brother, he did not outwardly, explicitly, act upon them, refer to them. The knowledge showed itself only in his manner, his evasions, his shrinking co-operation.

Like two connected tanks of water, the whole contents of one was tipping down into the other, the contents of that being driven up into the first. All Roland's past affection, blind devotion, his extravagant submission, his willingness for prostitution, sank slowly out of his upper mind; and all the resentment, hate, aggression, and desire for absolute, true, spiritual independence, was thrust gushing from his lowest unconscious depths.

The force of each head of water drove on the other. Down, down, down, out of sight for ever, sank his love; up, up, up, spouted his flooding hate. Fascination for his brother's magic power, Roland's hypnotised subjection, the balance of unconscious domination *versus* conscious submission, remained. Irresistible forces were gravitating towards immovable objects. What happened at such times? What would happen at this?

Roland shook himself free out of the dark, evil maze, and sought defiant refuge in the light of day. His brother was just the same as he had always been, a dominant figure certainly, but all the finer for that and deserving of gratitude. Where would Roland have been, where would his sisters, if not for this characteristic of their elder brother? Squashed jellies, vibrating featureless and lifeless, in a mould whose maker was a deranged devil, and who could not now have rescued them had she wished.

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And Roland complained? Did he expect to be rescued from his mother by a pretty gentleman, have all his battles fought for him by an angel? To have his difficulties smoothed away by an intelligent lackey—to be then dismissed because Roland did not care to be reminded of his debt!

Charming, fascinating youth! Talented genius! Assuredly he deserved these things as his birthright!

Roland hated and despised himself more than his brother, and, as had been his habit since he could remember, he inflamed the inward conflict by urging his adversary's argument more fiercely than his own, to expiate his own guilt and quieten his remorse.

But his new-discovered feelings remained. He must be free, he must be a man, he must live his own life, not another's. Abandon this scorching, purposeless hate. Work his way to "freedom" like a reasonable being, but give up this vindictive, senseless, monstrous ingratitude. He could hardly argue that his brother merited more hate than his mother, yet he gloried in his recognition that he did not hate his mother now. Ah, but she was dead; he had no need. Oh? Then when his brother was dead too? . . . It must wait till then? So that was it, was it?

His thoughts flicked back to the three solutions which logic had pointed out when his conflict under dual control towards the end of his mother's life had begun to bring him near to breaking point: his mother might die, his brother might die, he might die. Common sense had pointed out that there was only one—the first. Common sense had been right,

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if only in part. His mother's death had solved many difficulties. Not all, it was true; there he had been mistaken. But that again was natural; it had been a time of dreadful strain, and it had been clear that only one thing could end it. Naturally, all his thoughts, as, perhaps, too many hopes, had been centred on the one event.

Now logic pointed out that there were only two solutions: his brother might die, or he might die. Common sense pointed out that there was only one—the first. But if common sense was right before, it was surely wrong now. He did not really want his brother to die. No, no; they had not reached that pitch. Common sense was notoriously a fallible guide if always leaned upon. It was the refuge of the unimaginative, a rule of thumb for dullards. Obviously it was wrong here.

Then, what was the solution? What?

Roland did not know.

To banish the whole nightmare into limbo? To draw nearer, not farther from his brother? Perhaps, but it would be hard. No denying but what it would be hard.

He had so often flung himself to the extremity of self-sacrifice, gloried in renunciation, dissolved his ego in his brother's. How could he do more? Or, if not more, the same? The same, over and over again, till no conflict remained because only one person existed; till his brother and he were one, and he was absorbed, utterly, to the last drop of his spiritual being, into his brother's personality? No, no. He could not. He recoiled in horror, in hate.

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It was his brother's image which brought that solution. It was no solution. Then what was?

His brother offered none; he offered none; common sense offered none; logic offered none. What was the solution?

What?

Roland put a shell round his quivering interior and wrapt round it a coil of cynical reflections. He turned again to his music with extravagant vigour and enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, life did not mean to him what it appeared to mean to most people. Others went steadily on, trundling contentedly a single burden of achievement towards the grave, flitting happily in their intervals of relaxation from one pleasant diversion to the next. They seemed easily pleased with the world, not at all concerned about themselves. Roland was discontented with the world, and both cherished and loathed himself.

He felt so deeply about music that his progress was paralysed. He trundled no achievement. He groaned, pushed his burden till his muscles cracked, yet could hardly advance it by a yard. His progress was so slight, his talent so crowded from the public gaze by hundreds of others just as fine, that his travail, his sensibility, passed practically unnoticed. His talent remained so little recognised ("undoubted, but Mr. Greer would be well advised to discipline it somewhat more before his next recital. The performer also played a not unpleasant composition of his own.") that Roland at times wished, even believed, that he had none. Yet he felt far

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superior to most people, and was positive that he had genius. He admitted to himself that it needed "disciplining," but hated those who told him. What did they know of music, or his comprehension of it? What did they know of the pains and toils he had endured for it? Yet had not other musicians done the same? Was he unique? Did he think that he was made differently from everybody else?

"Yes!" he blurted to himself, defying the unknown, invisible inquisitor.

But self-praise was no substitute for the praise of others; he wanted plaudits—he was damned faintly. He struggled for the recognition of the world; he fought, when he did not win it, against the craving to retire inside his shell and console himself with self-pity and self-praise. But these efforts scarred him, battered him. He could not struggle so for ever.

He sought calm, placidity, solitude.

He had bought his cottage—where the secret honeymoon had been spent—in secluded wooded country, and went down there alone for week-ends. But the solitude was unendurable, and he craved for London after the first few hours.

The country was beautiful: the silken ripple of a thrush's voice the only sound by day, the nights marvellous with stars. But he could have cried out to the cold, dark, winking heavens for a companion, for affection, for success. He loitered disconsolately by the stream on which the moon lay smashed and scattered in a thousand ivory chips.

That was himself he saw in dead, white pieces,

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that was his music. His piano had been shattered, and the white notes rocked and danced and clicked mockingly at him in the night. If he snatched at them he could feel only cold liquid and they would vanish; he was Tantalus. If he sat still and gazed down upon them, he could see only his own face, his all-absorbing self, and they would vanish; he was Narcissus.

If his musical talent lay broken round him like the reflection of the moon, what then? What was left?

But it was not broken. The moon was the moon, not his piano. He would go on! He would work! And Roland walked back to his cottage in feverish determination. But the solitude was in the cottage, in the garden, in the roses languishing unseen, and in the stream whispering secretly unheard.

He must return to London! Next time he wanted relaxation he would make Janet bring him in her car. He would have friends, jollity, company; they would go for long walks; and he would pick out on a guitar to an appreciative, ignorant few the first movement of his latest composition.

"Not unpleasant," indeed! How he would wither the barren critics! How foolish he would make them feel when they realised that they had failed to back the right horse. He would baste them, the conceited parrots, who had never felt one note of music wring their souls, who had never felt the feeblest pangs of travail of an artistic birth. Did they think they could dismiss years of "discipline" and the agonising struggles of a torn

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soul in two lines of an arty-crafty weekly? He would baste them, the sniggering pygmies, he, who would be remembered and played long after the ink which held their filthy nonsense had gone yellow and the paper it was printed on and the weeklies it was bound in had powdered into air.

Roland returned to London and worked at his music, following the hateful advice of the barren critics to "discipline" himself (even then they had missed the mark; it was his passion, not his talent, he must discipline), and evolving painfully "not unpleasant compositions."

Perhaps what stung him was his feeling that the critics were right, for he found repeatedly that, when emotion swept him most strongly, his talent became numbed, overwhelmed by the tempest that surged through him, and that his playing was purer, better balanced, and even more expressive, when he kept his feelings under his control.

But, still, he never advanced quite so easily, quite so far, as he had expected. His energy seemed to be consumed in struggling, not in creating.

He cast round anxiously for an explanation, and found it. He was hampered by that wretched Bureau. If only he could give his whole time to his music, then his life would be properly filled and balanced. Now, he had to work at his music in his spare time, which meant that he had none for relaxation, none for reading, talking, friends. More, he could only begin his music when he was already tired; at least, could never come to it absolutely fresh.

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If he made music his work proper, then he would have more time for recreation, and his life would run more smoothly. Discontent would vanish; he could mix solitude and company as he liked; and he would be spending his whole time instead of only a fag end of it as he felt he ought to be spending it.

No wonder his energy was consumed in struggling, and that for every foot he advanced he slid back eleven inches.

A conflict faced Roland which had not loomed so large for some months; he must give up the Bureau, and break the news to Daniel, or—give up his music altogether.

To do that now was impossible. If he had had to form a definite decision before he had reached so far in making a musical career, there would have been little doubt of the issue—Daniel would have won. But now that Roland had given a recital, reached the stage of composing, and put his precious wares before the public gaze; now to give up his career, his life blood, see his life's plans go to the wall, and all for the sake of a bloody bureau for economic research—no! Never!

Perseverance with his musical work had given Roland some, if not a great deal, more emotional stability, and, sick though he felt at the prospect of tackling his brother, he was not paralysed by the thought. Even if it meant a violent quarrel, he felt he could go through with it. He had now something to fight for, something of his own. That had never happened before. It had always been

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a fight for some person, and then not from need, but an externally imposed demand.

He had never had anything permanent to gain whether he lost or won; now he felt that he had everything. Fighting for a thing was better than fighting for a person; or, if he cared to look at it another way (which it dawned upon him that he did), fighting for himself, truly and only for himself, for Life No. 4, was better than fighting like a Helot for somebody else.

Even if Daniel turned nasty, Roland could not contemplate surrender now. In any case, it would not distress him so very deeply, if he saw rather less of Daniel for a while. He could quite happily do without his company for a few months, a year. It would besides be tactful—Roland knew his Daniel—to keep away from his brother for a little after the dissolution of their partnership. Roland knew that Daniel always needed time to readjust himself when his *amour-propre* had been touched. And in this case it would be severely touched. So Roland took heart. There was just time.

IV

DOCTORS say sometimes that a woman swears the day after her first baby has been born that she will never have another as long as she lives; that on the second day she wonders what she shall call the child; and on the third whether the next one will be a boy or a girl. Having indulged in this moderate little dose of cynicism, they point out seriously that if human beings normally possessed the faculty of feeling in memory or imagination with the same intensity the pains which they may actually have suffered or will suffer, life would be an unending agony and they would be unable to survive.

It must have been this protective mechanism which caused Roland to make an error of judgment. It must have been his growing concentration on his music which made him forget and under-estimate the dogged will, the sledgehammer fighting power, and the capacity to hurt and hate, which his brother possessed. If Roland had remembered or realised these fully, it is doubtful whether, music or no music, he would ever have had the courage to take the step on which he had determined.

His whipped-up resentment and indignation with his brother for his ignored promises and casuistical evasions helped Roland, too, to deaden his recollections and fan his spirit.

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Trembling with defiance, fear, and a host of other emotions too fluid to distinguish, Roland waited late one afternoon for his brother to come in. Daniel had left the office just before lunch on business, and Roland went back to his brother's flat in order to speak to him alone when he returned. If only he could suppress his agitation, which always provoked Daniel to reckless, hard, heated words, Roland felt all might go smoothly.

He would not be brusque; he would tell Daniel calmly, gently, of his decision; give him time. He was not going to leave him in the lurch and give up the work at once, for Daniel would need to find a substitute; Roland would give him anything within reason—say, six months. Not that he was bound to. But he wanted the whole affair settled amiably; and having gained his main point he could afford to soften the disappointment.

He waited, but Daniel did not come. Roland told Eileen he had to see Dan that night, and stayed to dinner with her. His look was tense, and he started nervously when a step drew near, but Eileen ignored his evident preoccupation (she listened to but never asked for his confidences, especially where Daniel was concerned) and they passed the evening in desultory conversation, which Roland interrupted and prolonged by playing the gramophone.

Eleven o'clock, and Eileen went to bed. Roland waited in Daniel's study, littered with papers, the walls hideous with charts.

Twelve o'clock came. One o'clock in the morning.

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Roland's determination turned to bewildered doubt. His brother's lateness was nothing unusual—he was probably discussing World Economics with that dreary little genius, Armour. But since he was not back at one o'clock he might not be back till two, three, four. Roland was damned if he was going to wait till any hour to please his brother just then. Besides, Daniel would be tired out when he did come in; Roland could hardly begin a discussion on a question of this importance in the small hours of the morning.

If Daniel were not in by half-past one, he would write him a note. Roland considered the idea. Yes, that was a splendid way out—it would save much strain to avoid breaking the news to his brother's face. Roland disposed of the accusation of cowardice with summary ease. Did Daniel think he could keep a man waiting for eight hours, up to any hour of the night? He could go to Hell!

Roland hoped now that his brother would come home late, since to discuss such a topic now without losing their tempers would be well-nigh impossible, and to explain his presence at that hour without mentioning the real reason even harder. Still, Roland felt he must give his brother a fair chance, and he waited, anxious, but scrupulous, till the clock chimed half-past one. Then he nervously caught up paper and pencil and wrote.

Suppose his brother entered while he was doing so! What an ignominious position! What a strategical disadvantage!

But Daniel did not come in till two hours later,

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and had undisturbed stillness and three or four hours of the night in which to adjust himself to his brother's brief announcement.

"I waited till one-thirty a.m. to see you, but went home then, as I'd been here since five or six p.m.

"You may remember after Mother's death saying that you anticipated you would be able to do without my help in the Bureau in one or two years—'two years at the outside.' I have waited several times for you to bring the matter up and mention what arrangements you were making, but you haven't done so. As it is now over three years since Mother died, I'm afraid I must dissolve our partnership myself. I need my time for my own work. Don't put yourself out about it at once, but I suggest that a few months ought to see the final arrangements complete.

"Shall be at the office to-morrow as usual.—R."

Daniel was stunned. "Over three years." Was it? He never remembered dates and did not now know the date of their mother's death. Over three years? How could it be true?

But what if it were? Two or three, three or four, what difference did that make?

He had struggled and struggled to set the Bureau on its feet, make it a unique organisation, unique in the world, of value to the world.

He had passed by without a thought, and his wife too, without a pang, one opportunity after another of becoming personally rich at the price of giving his time to ordinary "business" and seeing the Bureau die. He had worked anonymously, seeking and winning no recognition, like a slave. He had done

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what he considered his "bit" in the war; and afterwards, not only in the first years but later too, he had continued to keep in sight the cause of international peace, and rational co-operation between classes and countries in wringing the necessities of life from the earth. He had gone on doing his bit, and at the war pitch of energy, long after others seemed to have forgotten, if not that there had been a war to end war, what it had been about, what it had ended in, what had been left by it.

He had done the work gladly, and without bothering about personal reward. He had risked too much of his fortune, even after he had a wife and child, too often. He had done three men's work for nearly eight years. He had saved the whole organisation time and time again when subordinates and faint-hearted friends had failed him, chances turned against him. But it was not only time, energy, money, that he had poured into the jaws of this Frankenstein's monster; it was all the gifts of his brain.

He had come to identify himself so completely with his Tiber that his wife had sometimes thought that if she or their daughter died he would mind less than if Tiber died. If Tiber died, Dan might even—and perhaps by his own hand.

She hated the thing sometimes despite its value, and her husband's fine passion, which drove him on; despite the help which she herself had given; but she was content to let her husband and his Tiber be, so long as his happiness exceeded his anxiety.

It seemed nearly as impossible to Eileen—nearly

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as "unthinkable," in the idealistic jargon of those post-war years—that the Bureau should ever cease to exist, as it did to Dan himself. Yet she felt it was devouring him, that he was struggling to build an edifice of stone upon sand, and that as he struggled under his loads, as he placed one stone painfully above the other, he did not notice he was himself pressed down into the sand, till it crept higher and higher round his legs, his waist. She felt admiration for her husband at times, pity at others, and even, she had to admit in time, dread. For his consuming passion could make him inconsiderate, hard, selfish, even cruel.

What a stand-by she had found in Roland with his greater gaiety, his more human weaknesses, his vivacity. How puzzled Roland would have been to know that this was how his sister-in-law regarded him. That the frenzied effort to cover up a sensitive spot by the transparent trick of poking fun at himself before anybody else had a chance to laugh at him could be mistaken for gaiety; that his despicable crimes could be whitewashed into "weaknesses"; or his sparse intervals between his gloom, when he felt that he might as well fiddle as not while Rome burnt, could be prettified into "vivacity"; would have left him dumb, gaping.

But Roland's inability to see himself as others saw him was one of his worst weaknesses, of which he never became conscious.

His relations with his sister-in-law were a refreshing oasis in the wilderness of his relationships with women. Being outside the sexual arena (sexual

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life seemed generally to mean a fight), yet beautiful and near his own age; intimacy with her brought a gift to his door by the efforts of someone else; not needing to be wooed or petted, yet active, affectionate, and equable, Eileen had seemed to Roland from the first a pearl among women. In all his trials and tribulations, when his judgment failed him and his vision grew dark, when he was quarrelling with friends, pursuing women or flying from them, burying his mother or whirling on the outer rings of the muddy vortex of the divorce court, Roland never let his picture of Eileen shift out of focus; and he enjoyed the rewards to the end of his life.

He could work off his irritations with Eileen more easily than with anyone in the world, and, although he sometimes felt, and was, a brute, and was overcome by remorse, he never imagined that she was about to cast him out for ever and ever. Even Daniel's power to influence he doubted there.

But Eileen's relations with her brother-in-law were not always easy for either to maintain. The same reckless attachment and willingness for sacrifice which were the core of Roland's complicated coil of feelings for his brother had taken deep and lasting root in Eileen for her husband. Both Eileen and Roland knew that, stronger than their affections for one another, standing between and towering above them, was their loyalty to Dan. When one of them was feeling out of sympathy, or worse, with Daniel, it was a delicate situation for them if they happened to be together.

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But Eileen's loyalty sprang out of a fineness, a simplicity of character, Roland's out of community of experience and aims.

His might be broken, hers never. Or, if ever, only under a far severer strain. Eileen, therefore, became a tactful person, and Roland still more. Eileen's again was a tact of unsubtle, gentle kindness, Roland's a tact sprung from anxiety, fear, insecurity, and never far from finesse.

These two kinds of tact in their most naked forms did not work well together, and, recognising this, Eileen and Roland had tacitly adopted the custom of keeping silent and apart, whenever a situation approaching the serious began to make demands upon either of them or both.

"I suppose you encouraged him to do this!" Daniel flung at her without warning or explanation as he dropped Roland's note in front of her at breakfast. Her husband looked dark, hard, agitated. She did not know of what he was talking, but understood his tone of voice too well. She would be wise to avoid him.

He scarcely believed her denial, or her assurance that she had not even known of the contents. Now she understood his agitation, and the look of desperation on his face which she scarcely remembered ever seeing before. She escaped as soon as she could without provoking him, her lids hardening slightly in the perfect curves with which they edged her eyes, her lips straightening themselves into a horizontal line of tense narrowness.

Roland was puzzled, frightened, when his brother

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did not come to the office in the morning, and when still he did not come that afternoon.

"More of his insolent, casual treatment," he thought. "I wonder if His Majesty will condescend to take notice at all."

The next morning, too, Daniel stayed away, sent no word to his clerk, no acknowledgment to his brother. This was too much for Roland. His resentment flared like celluloid. Like a little boy who knows he has been rude and awaits his nurse's smack with fright and remorse, and who then, slowly realising that she is too lazy to administer chastisement, takes his courage between his hands and returns, with saucy impudence, comically cocksure, to the attack, so Roland, his nerve too beginning to break under the strain of waiting for some sign as to how his brother would react, lost patience, regained a desperate courage, decided to write again.

He did not like to telephone to Eileen; he could not drag her into this affair—yet. Thus, he remained ignorant of Daniel's reaction, though he was on tenterhooks to know, and came very near once or twice to telephoning to Eileen after all. But instead, he put on a postcard:

"Did you receive my note left for you by hand two days ago? No immediate hurry for an answer, but discussion may be desirable.—R."

At last—now, by return of post—came a card in reply:

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"Yrs. recd. Reply not poss. before. Will despatch in a day or two. Indeed, I have not a little to say.—D. G."

Roland's stomach turned to whey, his mouth grew dry. Ah! He had been too rude to nurse. She had not been asleep, or lazy. She was advancing slowly towards him. He held his breath.

It had been a little misleading to write "reply not possible before," since Daniel had done nothing for forty-eight hours. But he meant psychologically possible, and he was not going to explain a refinement of that sort on a postcard. Besides, what did a lie matter? What did anything matter?

Roland appeared to have taken leave of his senses—or Daniel had. "Dissolve our partnership!" Was Roland crazy? Was he a demon?

Daniel could not believe that Roland could conceive or do a thing like that without instigation.

"Who has been setting you against me?"

When he was specially overworked, when one faint-hearted friend or voluntary helper after another told him he "found he wouldn't be able to stay after all," Dan felt keen sympathy with that ghostly motto. He asked Roland the question now, directly he recovered his faculties, and his mind turned like a flash upon the only woman he knew to have knowledge, and influence over his brother. In these moods he was capable of believing anybody might have betrayed him. When his wife left him after breakfast he realised his mad mistake, but smothered his remorse at hurting her under his rising feelings against Roland.

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'It was alone, then, completely alone, that Roland had evolved this step. Daniel was stunned, winded. Then, like frost-bitten fingers thawing into life, numb, aching, swelling passion pressed up and through him. Little contiguous numbed areas came hot suddenly in little bursts. Now here, now there, tracts of recollection, of indignation, supported by reason after reason, at his brother's treatment of him pulsed suddenly anew; the numbness gave way first in one region then in another to the heat of his blood, which rushed in fierce painful jerks and throbs forward over the whole frozen area, like an evil, creeping stream of lava down the slopes of a volcano.

Roland was a traitor. Daniel had been betrayed. The little swine, to plan it secretly like that, and then to spring it on him without so much as one word of warning! The anæmic-spirited little cur! So Roland too did not believe in him?

To leave him at a crucial moment just when at long last the Bureau was about to be finally and powerfully established, to abandon him now!

Daniel thought of the power he might come to wield, once this crisis was passed; of how much Roland's desertion might be cheating him. Roland had worked so splendidly. They had worked together so splendidly. Roley's amazing facility for foreign languages and his training in economics, Daniel's powers of organisation, his ingenuity, his vision—they were a combination in a thousand! He would never have believed this of Roley.

Daniel spent the whole of the first day in his

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study alone, answering curtly if his wife came to ask a question or started conversation. He would believe her if she asserted positively she knew nothing about this business, but that was all. Had he known that, he would never have shown her Roland's letter. It hurt him, more than he could bear anyone to know, even his wife, even himself, to confess how vulnerable he was where Roland's affection for him or his for Roland was concerned.

The second morning he spent gathering his forces, trying to admit to himself that Roland had a perfect right to go, that he himself had had plenty of time but had traded on his brother's feelings of attachment, and trying to accustom himself to the thought of working on alone, absolutely alone. He would never find another man, another person, even, who would be to him, spiritually, historically, practically, what his brother, his friend had been. But there was nothing for it. If Roland said he was going, he would go. Dan must control his bitterness and, to avoid or at least postpone any painful interview, would answer his brother in writing.

Then, just when Dan had determined to counter-sign his own death warrant, the slender lash descended again without warning, and, like a wetted towel in the tormenting hands of malicious devils at his public school, flipped him, stung him smartly, on the same spot already sore and burning. When Roley's postcard came, Dan's self-control, the tolerance he had forced himself to adopt, his affection, all went in a flash. They dropped as a pile of plates might be dropped, and smashed to

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atoms in a moment, in a clattering clashing roar that was the battle-cry of a wounded man.

With deadly coolness Daniel wrote his two lines on a postcard. The fire which he had managed to bank down burst through the cooling cinders which had covered it, and leaping flames, scorching, shrivelling, roaring, enveloped him. His passion burned him so fiercely that he had to wait for it to die down before he could put pen intelligibly to paper. Even the Bureau itself dwindled to unimportance beside the necessity for lashing his brother till the treacherous rat squealed and begged for mercy.

V

ROLAND lay on his bed utterly incapable. He felt as though he had been pushed under water, held there, and had come to the surface only just alive. He could hardly believe what his eyes had read. Ten pages, closely covered with a writing with no "thicks" and "thins," in which the pen seemed never to have been lifted from one end of a line to the other; ten pages of reproach, tirade; insane, horrible abuse; ten pages of crazy accusations, misinterpretations, half-lies, lies, and fantastic romance, ending with a threat, a curse, and an excommunication, had reduced him to dazed prostration.

Fascinated, shuddering at the horrors which ink and paper could beget, he read them through again, then again. Each time he did so, each time he came to the most terrible, the maddest jeers and thrusts, his heart was wrung by an iron grip. The first reading hurled him into the air, then let him crash, shattered, to the ground. Every time he re-read, it was like re-living, re-seeing, a "slow motion" cinematograph version of the same disaster. He would never have believed this of Danny.

"Still," Roley thought, as he painfully picked himself up after the explosion, "he can't prevent me going—he says so."

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"I am not willing to make any arrangement for at least three weeks, since this would entirely destroy any possibility of permanently establishing or even reconstructing the Bureau on a self-supporting basis, which as you know (or does little Roley still pretend he didn't?) was about to be done for good and all quite soon. But I undertake to sign the proper legal document within two months. I should be glad if you will let me have your assent to this arrangement within forty-eight hours, and I will then have my solicitors carry out the whole business properly.

"Meanwhile, I should be obliged if you will keep out of my way. Perhaps you might do most of your work (I mean Bureau work. Doubtless, you will excuse my frivolity in calling it 'your work'—I quite agree it is not really work for you, nor to be compared in importance with your latest *Fantasia in G minor*. I trust by the way that you are progressing with the 'disciplining of your talent'—I mean musical talent. That for writing friendly 'demand notes' clearly needs none. It is possible you may consider mine for writing replies does. However, I am not so sure)—perhaps, I repeat, you would be good enough to do most of your Bureau 'work' at home till we have made more convenient arrangements for the avoidance of imposing on each other the loathsome need of our respective presences. (I beg you will excuse me the temerity of making the distaste mutual.)

"D. G."

Roland, like Daniel, was blinded from seeing that his brother was really wounded to the quick, by his own pain, indignation, and hatred, and it would have seemed the last extreme of idiocy or cynicism in anyone to assert that despite all it was certain each still loved the other.

The brakes were released, the course determined, and they were off, their passions racing, hurtling,

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like chariot horses into battle. Slash! Lunge! Massacre! Stab! Slay! Destroy, destroy—the enemy or self, either or both, but destroy! Let pain goad to hatred! Let hatred shrivel friendship into ashes. Spit on love, smear it, bury it with filth; it will never be needed again.

The brothers abandoned themselves to their frantic lust and poured each upon the other all the hatred they had nursed against the callous forces of the world which had knocked success from their grasps so many times, and had deceived, pushed them back into the mire, and wasted their struggles and sacrifices of years.

Each letter contained falseness, each brother seized on this for reply, adding others, ignoring whatever had been true. The streams of their abuse, vindictiveness, and crazy hate, now terrifying like the hate of giants, now grotesque like the hate of screaming children, hurtled on and over each other's heads till it seemed they could never stop. Only sheer exhaustion of vocabulary, past history, and nerves, seemed to cause the streams to slacken, dwindle, and then stop. Each returned to dignified typewritten communications, as though neither had moved a muscle from annoyance, nor infringed the most elaborate, trivial canon of the most impeccable politeness throughout this painful dispute.

With frantic, morbid glee Roland numbered, docketed, and preserved his brother's letters, locked them up. Daniel spilt ink over Roland's, let them lie about his study, his bedroom, in his coat pockets, for the housemaid or anyone to read; finally lost them.

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"Tiber will smash now, of course—bound to," Daniel flung out when discussing with Eileen in the very briefest manner the position brought about by his brother's action. Dan never showed her their letters, nor mentioned even that the question was discussed—if discussed it could be called—by letter and not by word of mouth.

Eileen remained scrupulously neutral. She thought her husband's attitude outrageous; of his behaviour she had only an inkling, but that was enough. Roland was unable to avoid all mention of the quarrel, and even read her some of Daniel's letters, and more of his own replies. She persuaded her brother-in-law to temper or omit some of his sentences, but no more.

Daniel was sullen because she did not screech with him against Roland, which made her antagonistic to her husband. But, though she did not look forward to completely losing Roland, she remained loyal to Dan, and never made a move against him.

Roland continued to come and see her. Tied to her home by the care of her little girl, she could not go out very much, and Roland had to go to her flat. Sometimes Dan came in while he was there. Then, impelled by motives which neither could explain, and acting under some impulse which might have had its origin in the days when the family used to conspire to pretend in their mother's terrifying presence that no scene or quarrel had ever taken place, both brothers talked, with urbane equanimity shielding their beating hearts, touched hands, as

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they passed each other matches or a cigarette, and even smiled in faint imitation of former uproarious delight at a joke which one of them could not prevent himself from making.

When the two met, they adopted this manner at once, yet they had never mentioned what they should do in Eileen's company or anyone else's. Their meetings were anomalous, and brought both discomfort and relief, the discomfort palpable, the relief unconfessed, causing strong desire for more. Each brother laughed with incongruous heartiness over the most trifling pleasantry, waxed exaggeratedly enthusiastic, showed startlingly deep emotion, over any tender music playing on the gramophone. Then they would stop, change without warning to a haughty sulk, and walk out of the room without a word.

"This can't go on," thought Roland, when alone, and decided to try not to see Eileen again till she could come out.

"This must stop," decided Daniel, when alone, and took to asking his wife twice a day if she had any engagements. Both brothers hoped wistfully that Eileen would continue as the perfect pretext for an indefinite time, and Eileen's hopes rose, that, by acting so, she might bring the two together. But she had never seen those letters and she underestimated the width of the gulf each was trying to recross.

Observing little progress, Eileen spoke to Roland openly and told him she was going to do the same with Daniel. Roland was taken aback, colour came

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into his face, his eyes shifted guiltily; he acquiesced, and left early.

Daniel listened without at first realising to what his wife alluded. He too was taken aback, colour came into his face, his eyes shifted guiltily. But initiative, that power which had deserted him but once, to deal with any situation on the spot, came to his aid, and he asked Eileen abruptly to stop. He had anyhow been thinking over these embarrassing meetings, and, though he did not even dream of considering he had any right to interfere with whom she chose to see, it might perhaps be better to alter things a little in some fashion. He would go on thinking it over and let her know.

That night Dan had to go north on business.

"It's no use," he decided, "it can't go on. Down with dreamland and the useless past! No, I can't bear these meetings. Better cut him out altogether. Yes: better for him too, as far as that goes. I can't possibly get on with Tiber as things are.

"Well, I suppose . . .

"I wonder . . . ?

"Oh, well, cut it out. Yes, cut it out."

Daniel's decision made, he wasted no time, no spiritual energy, in painful reflections. He was a realist. He would post the note to Eileen when he reached Manchester. He pressed his head against the railway upholstery, heaved a last, a "positively last," unhappy sigh, tilted his hat over his eyes, and went resolutely, if uneasily, to sleep.

Next morning Eileen received a letter:

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"Enclosed is a copy of a letter I have just sent to R. Please keep. D. G."

By the same post Roland received one too:

"Since both Eileen and I find it embarrassing to be unexpectedly liable to visits from you at the flat at times when we are otherwise expecting to be alone, it would perhaps be better if in future you abstained from these. Doubtless, if Ei. cares to see you, you will both be able to make other arrangements. D. G."

"P.S.—We are giving up our present flat in about two months. My address thenceforward will be the office."

Roland lay on his bed utterly incapable. This time no explosion had occurred, nothing, no drowning. He had been rowed quietly to a desert island, marooned.

He was powerless. He could not, if he wanted, set flowing again that torrent of abuse and hate. He did not hate. He loved his brother, wanted him, wanted to kiss his face, take and squeeze his thin brown shapely hands, with slightly crooked fingers and convex nails.

He would forgive Danny everything, everything, work in the Bureau for another ten years, as long as Danny needed him.

"But come back! Danny! Danny! I love you so, we *can't* not be friends. The trunk is no use without the branches; both must wither alone, flourish together. Danny, forgive me! I was horrible, cruel. I told lies, I hurt you wickedly. I was mad.

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"But it's over now, Danny-Wanny, it's over. Let's forget it! I love you so. You know I do. I've never loved anybody so much as I love you. You know that, don't you, turnip? Say yes, Danny!

"You will be friends, then, won't you? Oh, Danny darling, what relief! I feel as though I had seen you last a hundred years ago! How lovely just to be alive! Thank God you've come back."

"I find it embarrassing to be unexpectedly liable to visits from you."

"Embarrassing to be liable . . . embarrassing to be liable . . ." Roland's lips trembled; a groan dribbled from them.

Was this Life? Ah, which one? Was it No. 4—his very own?

Roland turned to the wall and stared at it till the sheet was moist with his breath, and the pillow hot under his cheek.

If this was No. 4, it was not worth having—he would sooner die.

"Ridiculous!" the world would say. "Ridiculous! Die just because you've quarrelled with your brother? Stuff and nonsense! Don't be childish! Why, be a man, and tell him to go to the devil!

"Tell *him* to die if he chooses! Be a man! You've got your own life to live, haven't you? You are only twenty something? Then pull yourself together!"

On that Roland fell asleep. He dreamed that

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Danny and Eileen and he had taken a flat together, and that Danny was laughing like a child with delight. New furniture was everywhere, gay colours on the walls.

Eileen was sad but Roland did not understand why. He and Danny went to shop after shop ordering furniture and books, and everything in which they had common tastes. Next day, it seemed, they went back to the new flat. When he arrived, the colours were ruined, the rooms empty.

He walked through them, and while he was doing so, heard steps. He went back to the room he had left, and, as he entered, a door in front slammed. On its inner side some letters had been scrawled in red chalk. It grew dark suddenly, but he could just make them out—"TRAYED." He had hardly finished looking when the door by which he had entered slammed too and he jumped round, frightened. On this door too he saw letters in red chalk, but in the dark he had to stand quite close to make them out. At last he did, but could make no sense of them.

"I don't understand," he muttered aloud. "'BE'? I don't understand. Be what?"

But a voice in his ear whispered, "Look at the back door—that's how you got in."

The voice was soft and quivering, and he leapt round, his heart in his mouth, frightened as you can only be in a dream. Dancing up and down, grinning, sneering, poking the air with a long piece of red chalk, and tapping him, whenever he could reach,

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gently on the mouth, was Dan. "Look again, Roley darling, Roley-Woley! The front door first!"

Roland remembered the two letters he had just seen, and then looked past his brother's shoulder.

"BE-TRAYED!" he exclaimed with guilty hesitation.

"That's right, Roley-Poley! You've been betrayed! You thought you were coming to live with Eileen and Danny-Wanny? Well, you're not, you see! It was just a little game. Ha! ha! ha!"

And Daniel lunged at Roland with the stick of red chalk.

Roland backed to the door and tried to open it, but he could not find the handle, and, as he was fumbling for it, Danny jibbered and leered and hopped and poked.

"You can't get out that way, Roley darling. Not that way, onion, because it's locked.

"Don't you remember? You've been betrayed? Yes, by me! Isn't it strange? Isn't it subtle? Isn't it a Fantasia? And you can't live with Eileen and me now, because I've killed Eileen and I'm going to kill you. Ha! ha! ha! She betrayed me, and you betrayed me. Now I've betrayed you both! Isn't it subtle? Ha! Ha! Ha!

"Say your creeping prayers, Roley darling. Would you like to be buried next to Myra and papa, or next to Eileen and me? I'll be sure to throw earth on you with a spade in either case. Choose, Roley, choo-oose, my little Judas, my loving little worm, my little back-door rat! Say good-bye, brother! Good-bye!"

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At that Danny lunged at him in the dark with the stick of red chalk, which he had been holding behind his back. But Roland, who had been tugging with one hand at the door-handle and warding off his brother's taps with the other, who was sweating and wet on his body and face, though his mouth was dry and furry, suddenly grappled with his brother and they fell to the floor.

His brother went on laughing in a falsetto and tried to imitate their mother's voice, and he kicked off a slipper and laughed louder and pitched his falsetto still higher, wrestling ingeniously all the while. But suddenly Roland caught the hand which held the red chalk, and as he did so fear left him.

A flame of lightning flashed from his own mouth and wriggled a pattern in the air like an aeroplane emitting illuminated letters in the night. And the pattern split up into letters and he read HATE.

A smell of bad meat was left, and with a howl he shouted: "That's it!" and leaping away behind his brother's head plunged the stick of chalk into Dan's cackling mouth. The falsetto was spitted on the red point, and Roland's knuckles were scraped against Dan's teeth.

Suddenly the lights in the room went up, and a woman's voice said, "That is all, ladies and gentlemen, for this evening," and there was his mother, smirking at a crowd of strangers who had come in by the back door, and tugging at his sleeve. Roland pulled his hand out of his brother's mouth, still holding on to the stick of chalk, but the stick was

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gone, and in his hand was a delicate, thin, tapering dagger, whose point was red, like the chalk.

He tried to stop his mother pulling at him, but she only pulled harder. The people by the door began to murmur, and suddenly Roland was pulled more roughly; he heard a soft quivering voice behind him say, ". . . till you are dead, dead, dead." He tried to scream and explain all at once, when, looking in the direction of the voice, which was high up and behind him, he saw two fine brown eyes under a wig and above a flowing scarlet robe.

He looked closer and peered against the dazzling lights, and made sure that it was Danny. But the judge, if it was, showed no sign of recognition, but said suddenly in a testy voice, "Take him away! Take him away! Next case, please."

Roland sprang up at him, lunging with the dagger. The brown eyes stared at him darkly, without moving, and, as Roland felt his weapon's point probe the surface of the body, he stopped, hesitating before drawing blood and trembling with relish. Just as he was deciding to pierce, as he felt the elasticity of the yielding flesh coming to its limit, and the tension of the surface increase before the blood spurted, his hand uncurled, the dagger melted, darkness came again; he woke.

He lay, looking at the ceiling. His pyjamas were soaked, he was trembling. He walked to a basin, was sick. He went back to bed; in spite of himself he went through his dream again.

He had been tricked, tricked by the obscure vagaries of his mind working out of his reach while

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he slept helplessly. It had shown this, this, as a picture of his deepest, most hidden desire.

But he had not betrayed his brother! He was bewitched by the distorted eloquence and insidious domination of his brother over him. He had not betrayed him!

Roland was weak from the terrible experience of feeling hate and love at the same time. He longed to hurt his brother, wept with remorse at the imaginarily accomplished crime.

The crime did not extinguish his love, his love could not prevent the crime. He must satisfy both. His emotional tension was so great that it seemed to him he could not endure physical existence if his passion were not slaked, his spirit soothed and drugged.

He suddenly remembered—he saw the words in red chalk on a shiny blackboard—what his thoughts had resumed for him about his conflict when his mother was still living, and later, when she was dead.

“There are only three solutions: that she should die, that he should die, that you should die.” “She” was dead.

As though somebody were laying along his body fine letters cut out of solid ice, he felt the thought sink into his mind, press cold upon him, clear, firm, and quiet, “He—must—die. He . . . He . . . He . . .

“I know,” he said aloud.

After his dream, a dagger occurred naturally to Roland. He got up and dressed.

“Now!” he thought.

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He dressed methodically, then went out. The day was warm and sunny, and without noticing what he had done Roland found himself sitting on a seat in gardens.

"I can't! I know I can't!

"Yet I can't go on without him. What shall I do? What shall I do?" And following the idiotic impulse of habit, he asked: "Danny, what shall I do?" Then he remembered, and laughed.

Still, life was no other thing but the resolution of this problem; not laughter, not hate, nor love, nor tears, nor music could alone divert and nourish him. He stared. His spirit drooped, his lips bent down at the corners, he felt craven, gutted, as when he had been seasick.

He would die if he could not live with Dan. He could not—he noticed the grotesque romantic terms—he could not "live without him." Daniel or he, Daniel or he.

Love throbbed into hate; hate became rage, threats, madness, murder, blood.

"Denn was er sinnt, ist Schrecken, und was er
blickt, ist Wut,

Und was er spricht, ist Geissel, und was er
schreibt, ist Blut."

Blood ebbed to remorse, remorse to tears, and so again to love.

He saw, not involuntarily or unreally as in his dreams, but clearly, deliberately conjured, Daniel's face, dead. The eyes would stare and bulge, so; the fingers, legs, and arms lie, so; the jaw gape, so.

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Lift a hand, it would drop back unresonant, like fish's flesh, upon the mud. Push the trunk over with a foot; it would roll back bent, purposeless, meaningless. The head would loll unsymmetrically, not knowing.

No. He could not do it. And to hang for it!

"Roland, don't be childish. You, hanging! Don't be childish!"

"Well, I could kill myself, too!"

"Don't be childish!"

"I could . . . oh yes, I could."

"How?"

"I don't know. But I could."

Ding, dong, ding, dong, ding, dong, ding dong. Silly thoughts went on. Any fool can say Yes and No.

Roland got up. "Eat. Something good, too, and damn the extravagance! I may forget! Let's go to a theatre and have a whore. I love chorus girls. Almost worth going over to Paris. They're naked there. Lovely!"

"He doesn't know I'm having lunch at this moment—not even thinking of me.

"If I give in, won't you take me back? Do! Do! Do! Love me again! Like me, even! Let me be with you—that's good enough. Come a little of the way towards me, won't you?"

"Ah, but I said I'd forget.

"This chicken's good. I like it cold. The skin tastes better. Potato salad, too. Lovely!"

Roland pushed in mouthfuls that were too big. He had bad manners.

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"I always have to give way in the end. Why can't I make other people give way to me? Follow me, be like me . . . be like me . . ."

He went on with his chicken, separating, cleanly, the pleasant-looking flesh from the bone.

"Bone," he mused. "Would a human bone look like this? Perhaps this is one. A wrist bone, say. It's short and slender. But this is polished, and bluish. Human skulls always look a dirty cream and dull . . . Then this is cooked, skulls aren't.

"I wonder what human flesh does look like, cooked. This raw, red flesh next the joint doesn't disgust me, because I *know* it's a chicken's joint, an unidentifiable, nameless chicken.

"If the waiter came and told me now that this bloody substance which I'm forcing apart deliberately from its bone had come off the forearm of my mother, what should I feel?

"Ugh! *Ugh!*" he thought, but went on eating.

"When I hear this noise," he wondered as he broke a bone in pieces, "nothing happens inside me; I can go on reading *The Times*. Yet if someone whispered in my ear, 'That is your mother's finger being broken,' I should feel sick, and the noise would seem to me terrible. It would make me see my mother's anguished face and her finger smashed, with a bone splinter sticking through the flesh. Oh! How horrible! Why do I think these loathsome thoughts?"

But he went on with his chicken and finished it.

Eileen wrote:

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" . . . I'm terribly sorry. He just doesn't talk about you at all, you see. In his present mood, I simply daren't start the subject. I'm awfully sorry, darling. But you do understand, don't you? I think gradually he might change—in a few years, perhaps. But he's so unapproachable. You know what I think about it all. But that doesn't help much—I admit. I hate him at times for his cruelty to you. He seems to me to be a devil. I can't think how he can do such things."

"A few years . . ."

"So unapproachable." "Hate him." "A few years . . ." "Years . . ." "Years . . ."

What good was that—or Eileen's hate? Damn her! What right had *she* to hate "him"?

"Years . . ." "Years . . ."

VI

ROLEY laughed. She was a pretty girl and he was getting on fast. How ripping of Janet to have brought her! A few more week-ends like this and Roland might find himself with Anne at his cottage alone.

The cottage had been a good investment. Yes. But nights were so unpleasant. Dreams left one so tired. However, the day made up for them, and perhaps the nights, if Anne . . . Would she? That smile; he had touched her hand too. But you never know with these damned women; they pretend such a thing had never entered their minds! Ugh! Damn the snakes!

The week-end passed quickly. These crowded week-ends at the cottage with his sister and her friends always did. That was what was so nice about them. A sensible combination too—Roland, a cottage, Janet, a car. With girls like Anne about it was difficult even not to become a little sentimental. Well, what matter? Nothing mattered.

But it was so hopeful, so hopeless, so intense, so lonely, yes, really, so appallingly lonely, being alive.

"Still, while there's life there's hope, as some bloody fool said," Roland reflected, as he settled himself in the dickey of his sister's car.

"Good-bye, little cottage!" waved Janet's friend, the ugly one.

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"*Au revoir*, little cottage!" waved Anne.

"Ah! my pretty, lustful darling! For those sweet words, much thanks!" gleamed Roland. He could hardly squeeze her hand or whisper delicious leading questions, separated by a pile of suit-cases. So he leaned back and snuffed the scented air.

"Ah! Life is good. Hell take it, though, that's how everybody is tricked! She gives me a look, and I think there may be something doing. But life is good only if something is doing. And how can I do anything?"

Roland's ebullience suddenly subsided, like a punctured balloon of bright colours. Crinkled, shapeless, flabby, it looked a sorry object, and Roland felt sorry for himself. He hated the three happy chattering girls in front of him. The back of Anne's head told him as plain as could be that she imagined it was as pleasant to pursue as be pursued. Was it, though! She could go to the devil, and scalp some other fool!

In any case, what was a woman? Unimportant event. He could do without. There were other things. Woman sank into unimportance. He forgot her. His thoughts turned again, confused through a haze of self-pitying tears, upon himself. There was only one thing to think about, only one thing he did think about. Why pretend?

"Fool, face facts."

"There are no facts to face. And even if I do, there is nothing to be done."

"Oh? Then you propose just to go on, pretending all is well, living this mangy substitute for

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a life, till you're sixty or seventy? This is your much vaunted No. 4—your 'very own' life? You are welcome—a noble victory!"

"To hell with this rot about 'No. 4.' There's only one life, and thank God, too."

"And only one death—for one man. You can take another's first, if you try, can't you?"

"Can't you? Thank God for that too, won't you?"

"Oh, leave me! I've clinched that . . . Oo, and look at that lake! What a lovely castle in the middle!" Through the trees it looked beautiful.

Janet stopped the car for them to see, Roland moved across the road, holding Anne's arm—traffic was dangerous here.

She looked at him and smiled. Did she lean against him? But the ugly friend was looking. Ah! Hell take women!

Roland let the girls pack themselves back into the car.

Anne was a simpering fool. He hated her. Yet . . .

It was a queer world—could being dead be queerer?

As the vernal atmosphere charged his senses, Roland's spirit melted. Something was happening to the world, but he was being left behind. Something ought to be happening to him. He wanted to be, in some way, sharing this invisible, joyous, universal uprush of living things, but he could not.

He was jammed. He dreaded competition with

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his efforts to make his personality felt by others, and preferred to turn his desires inward upon himself. This loneliness of being unable to live his life in impact and contact with other human beings was harder to bear than the mere loneliness of believing that he was not loved.

But as the car moved through some dreary straggling bastard habitation—a weakling town, a festering village—he gazed at the figures on the pavements, and slowly realised he was alone no longer. Other people were unhappier than he though they might be unconscious of it.

For a time, perhaps the first, in which intellectual distress was outweighed by spiritual relief, Roland felt utterly but exquisitely detached from the world. He had had insight before, but always through his own conscious suffering reactions. Now he had insight, but without his personal fate or feelings being involved.

He smiled; he was God. He knew the meaning of Omniscience. He was a prophet, a Divine Eye; he had all the vision of the author of Ecclesiastes, none of his tortured passion.

He saw the innermost depths of the lives of the multitude, but they were not his lives. He was conscious that he knew something which no one else knew, that he saw the whole universe from ether to ether, from nothingness to nothingness; the whole world from pole to pole; the whole country; every woman, man, and child.

He saw with equal clarity both the system of this stupendous tangle and the shadow passing over the

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soul of the village woman at his elbow. He saw the relation of one to the other. But he could not explain. A word, a jar, and the vision would vanish. He saw the terrible relation of spiritual deformity to material exploitation and industrial environment; he saw the importance and fatuity of all things—mental, physical, and metaphysical—in one instant. But it was terrible that these million beings knew nothing, thought nothing, of their fate, when all the time they might.

He saw a tram clang by and halt. The car slowed down, was held up behind it, stopped.

“... cigarette?”

“Oh, Lord! I haven’t any left!”

“Have you any, Roley? . . . any, Roley?”

“No.”

He might at least offer to run into the shop while they were waiting. But he did not. Not very polite.

Anne fetched some, offered one to him. He shook his head, stared at her. Her nose was too long.

The tram conductor was pulling down the overhead rod on to the wire. He wore a peaked hat and uniform. It was those things made him a conductor. He knew tickets, electric contacts, seductive legs under short skirts, and Cockney badi-nage; he knew beer, fags, cinematographs, sleep, his wife’s body, and wiping his children’s noses; then more tickets. He knew that seven times, between a moon’s first quarter and its next. The whole cycle he must have known five hundred times. He was

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going to know it another five hundred. Did he know that? He *ought* to. He would die, believing he had lived.

Roland thought: "Over there goes another man, with red sandshoes, a banjo, a high collar, and a cap. He also is animate substance. That woman, with her swollen, pregnant belly, talks and is alive. But what is she? What the girl beside her will be; what the hag behind her was. They are all animate substance. They all believe they live. All are guilty components of this nightmare holocaust. Can no one stop them? What do they do, except make more? What is the purpose of them? Nothing.

"Why make more? Why make any? They do not even know that they are increasing themselves. What are their own purposes, even? Nothing. They are all, every one, responsible for the diseased horror that is man, and none is responsible.

"All and none, all and yet none. How can that be? Each knows only his individual experiences; none sees the world pattern to which he is criminally contributing.

"Kill them! Make them see!

"They cannot.

"Their thirsts, their hungers, their lusts, and their wearinesses, drive them to do what they do and nothing else. They shall annihilate themselves.

"No matter.

"But it does matter. They matter. I matter. Everything matters, though only in relation to us. This world, empty of man, would not matter; it

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would be a fleck of dust upon a fleck of dust upon a mirror reflecting the emptiness in a mirror reflecting nothing. No, nothing matters.

"Girl passing on the pavement with a lovely face and a statue's breasts; my lovely darling; your dark hair curving on your cheeks' hollows, your limbs rippling your dress; you do not matter! All your waking being's striving to be more beautiful is stupid. There are a trillion like you. Your lover in a bowler hat and with a waxed moustache wears a blue suit. He exists ten trillion times. He does not exist, though the ten trillion do.

"Lover, *you—do—not* exist. Realise, tremble, hush yourself! Know it! Let your grin change from complacency to terror. You are but the leg of a millipede. You are all legs of millipedes.

"But if it is because the universe will soon not be that the pretty tart does not matter, then nor does Newton, nor does the Song of Solomon, nor does Einstein.

"Impurities in metals are unavoidable natural phenomena; but impurities forming solid solutions affect the crystal grain size in the microstructure of a metal, and if the grain size increases it is accompanied by an increase in brittleness (phosphorus in steel). So you can do only eighty miles an hour, or the back axles of your motor-cars will break. A million years crept, like a lead roof, before that could be wrested from the unknown by Man with his brain, and now he can measure steel's temperature to one hundredth part. But that does not matter either. Stupid, stupid fool! He loves to torture

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himself and crucify his brother. He will not know what he might know; he will try to do what he cannot do, and what is useless."

Wind stung Roland sharply in the face. The ugly friend's scarf blew back towards him, occasionally touching him. It was a glorious burnt apricot, with a gentian blue border. A beautiful scarf. Anne wore one too; it was hideous.

"Just like her. Just like everybody." The world was stupid—evidently. Janet's scarf was pretty. So was Janet. She was kind, anyway.

Yet Roland thought: "Man has made me—He forces me to look upon us all. I must die. As the only extreme protest possible against man's filth, it is my duty. I do not want to. Yet no other escape from his perpetrations is open to me. Life is desirable in spite of him, and it is due to man, again, that this, my greatest conflict, thrives.

"I hate people for themselves; because they compel me to share their fate. I live under protest! The loathsome vermin. I am superior to them all! They may laugh at me, for all I care. They are grubs! I am God!

"I hate Winnie. I hate Juliette; I *loathe* Daniel. They frustrate me. They are burdens. None of them lets me be myself. When I am with them I dare not behave otherwise than as I know they expect me to behave; when I am alone I loathe myself for my subjection. They prostitute me. Hell take them! Juliette loved me, but what use was that to me? None. Only a Hell. I dread to meet her.

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"The world has no place for me. Curse it! I renounce it, though that, too, under protest. Oh, how I long to be at one with myself, to know content, and calm. I have only a ceaseless ache and a perpetual irk, like a dinghy chafing its painter on the tide.

"I am a Disappointed Man. But I am more—I am desperately miserable and lonely. I am thwarted, talented and unrecognised. I hate all those who judge me responsible and who are responsible themselves. My personal fate colours my objective judgment of the world. I know, but can't help it. In any case, what does my objective judgment matter? Sour grapes! Sour grapes! Sour! Sour! Sour! If I die, anyhow I shall call attention to myself! But my supreme grudge is that the world will never know I grudge dying, though I dread living.

"Janny is in front. She is a queer devil. She'll never understand my misery even if miserable herself. She'll just be upset and say she felt sure something was going to happen. I know! Well, though she was once, she's nothing to me now. Nobody is. I wish they were. I wish I could love. I have, in a past that is mine now it is past, but which was never mine in the present. I wish I could love! Ah! I know one person . . .

"But, Dan, we are at war. Bow to you again? Never! Take the first step? Never! Never! Never! If it is with my dying breath, I will tell you that I hate you. I will assert myself over you, cripple you by my own annihilation, if needs be,

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provided I may see you wince and know that you are suffering. Not one day shall pass in your life but shall hurt you and remind you that the cause of your pain is I—your brother, whom you ignored, were older than, taunted, and misjudged. You bungled there, didn't you, my Danny? You are *touché*, are you not, my infallible Robot!

"Wince! Wince! Let me see you wince! Let me see you are in pain! Plead to me, be below me! Implore! Be weaker than I! Surrender! Say I have won in the very, very end; and say it is by my own, Rolandish methods, and not your horrible Dannish methods.

"You *shall* surrender, swine, and hateful devil!"

"Roland."

"Roley!"

"*Roley!*"

Janet's face, her upper lip drawn upwards in irritated query, was close to Roland's shoulder. He climbed out of the dickey, took the suit-cases up to her rooms, let her chat and read her correspondence, before she drove him on his way home as far as her garage. He explained where he wanted to catch his bus, his voice kept level and fastidiously normal. He left his sister, leaped with ease on to a passing bus, and sat down inside, staring spitefully out of countenance a passenger who had turned an idly curious gaze upon his bulging rucksack and his country clothes.

The bus slowed down, rumbled off. Roland clumped stolidly away. It was dark.

VII

ROLAND walked up to his flat, ate some supper, read his letters, and sat down in the sitting-room. He looked at his watch. He felt tired, overcome with tiredness. He leaned back in the armchair and roofed his eyes with his arched hand. His heart sank, sank, sank. He felt as though he were being kept under an anæsthetic at, but just not over, the verge of consciousness. He felt weak, sick, and in despair. He was alone.

"No more. This is the end."

He found that he had leaned forward, stood up, and was walking into the hall.

"Tum, tum, tum." His feet knocked against the carpet-rods, which clinked as he went upstairs—quietly, because he felt frightened, two stairs at a time to show that he was not. He went into the bathroom, picked up his shaving things, walked into his bedroom, and shut the door.

He took off his coat. The top of the dressing-table was level with his chest, but, by standing on tiptoe for the moment and lifting his elbow, he succeeded in thrusting his left hand, with the palm up, into the topmost open drawer. Then he pushed the drawer to upon the knuckles with his knee. His hand thus wedged, he pressed his forearm down into the horizontal. With the blade of

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his safety razor he slowly approached the sunken artery of his left wrist, and, his heart beating against his teeth, yet with a deliberation amounting to fascination, he placed the edge lengthwise above the wrist, jabbed down and in, and drew the blade along his bare arm halfway towards his elbow. The sensation of the parting flesh under the incredible sharpness of the razor reminded him of tearing rubber.

A glorious dark red liquid, slightly viscous, welled steadily out, trickled deliciously over the matt, white skin, and disappeared. He attempted to cut in another spot, but found the limb already slightly tender, which destroyed his nerve. He loosened the drawer, took out his hand, and inserted the other. With his now streaming left hand he repeated the operation. This time he dug deeper, yet so sharp was the edge that it made no ploughing ripple as he drew it towards him, but clove the smooth white substance as a ship's prow does the sea. He withdrew his right hand, and stepping to the glass, took the razor to his throat. Intently he tilted the mirror back to obtain the best possible view, and felt round his Adam's apple for a spot where his jugular vein might be accessible. The trickle of blood, warm and unchecked, between his upraised fingers made him feel guilty and like a child who has spilt his drink. He somehow could not bring himself to pierce his throat.

He went to the bed, tore off his socks and trousers, and attacked the veins in his legs and thighs. Then he fetched a glass of water and, ignoring the streams

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of blood down his limbs, changed into cool pyjamas and lay down, drawing an eiderdown over him.

He was trembling now at the step he had taken. Actually as yet he could feel nothing. He turned on his side, and closing his eyes made as if to go to sleep in an ordinary way, trying to force out of his consciousness everything but the rhythm of his breathing. As usual, this was soothing, and in ten minutes he had reached a comfortable sleepy condition.

But sleep he could not. The warm sopping touch of the bedclothes recalled to him every time he moved what he had done. The room was dark; he could not see; and it grew difficult to distinguish by touch alone whether any spot was blood-drenched or not. To his distress he found himself growing less drowsy and more light-headed, and he felt not only unable but disinclined to contemplate anything in a serious way.

A picture by Lucas Cranach which he had seen at Munich, of Seneca standing, after cutting his veins, in a warm bath and, even in his extremity, preserving his modesty by a ridiculous, huddled attitude, passed before Roland's eyes. He was seized with the desire to taste, even to drink his blood, and he thrust his face against his arm and sucked gently. He felt tender and happy and thought of his mother, and then deliberately began to smear his face. Crooking one arm so that he could keep his lips to the wound without discomfort, he closed his eyes, drew up his knees, and fell asleep.

His sleep lasted, it seemed, but a short time; he

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re-opened his eyes and slowly moved. The blood seemed to have clotted, and over the sogging interior of the mattress a thin crust scratched his thigh. Half awake, or rather half dead, he made a slight movement, which hurt, so that he gave a violent jerk. The pain of this was like the tearing off of plaster, and the wounds, now opened afresh, began again to bleed.

He felt the blood trickling over his limbs, but faintly. Everything felt faint, and he, more peaceful. Making no effort, he did not feel weak, but beatific.

Why could not life always have been like this? It had sometimes, very like; but underneath had always been that spear of pain, whether it had been Juliette's arms hooped round his neck, and her lips and eyes killing him by their proximity, or tender music. Yet both had been worth while, in spite of the spears of pain. But then, weren't they worth repeating? No. At least, they might be, but it was also worth trying this for a change. . . .

"Death. Exquisite, perpetual rest."

"Not rest. Nothingness."

"All right, nothingness."

How easy the actual deed had been! If "they," his near and dear, could see him now! But they would, soon. And then?

He visualised himself as he would appear, white and grey, flaccid-faced, with angular set of limbs, and all round, dark, dark cherry; the wine of life, the magic liquid, spilt, *wasted*.

How they would hate him; they always did anyone who achieved what everyone else wants,

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but does not dare. He smiled—a laugh was too much effort—and closed his eyes. His thoughts became more of a panorama, less of a train of argument. Delicious drowsiness came creeping over him once more, yet not so gradual that he could not register the exquisite, effortless, magic slipping to oblivion.

But into the uneventful progress of this coma broke suddenly a throb, then another, slight, but followed by still more—a rhythm. In time with this, like water welling from a subterranean cistern, audible at first only in baby ripples, then swelling into rhythmic waves, he overheard, as he lay impersonally dying, a whispered conversation between two selves:

Yes, no; yes, no.

Do, don't; do, don't.

Do what? Live! Die!

Live, die; live, die.

No, yes; *n-no*, *y-yess*.

I *will*, yes! . . . Yes, *will*!

Too late, too late.

No, no, yes, yes!

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

Hell! Help! Help! Help!

Stop! Quick! Tr-rum tum!

Tum, dum, dum, dum!

My God, save me!

“ . . . ‘Died to save us all’ . . . ‘But I say unto you’ . . . That New Testament! He had read it once, in Greek—for his Smalls—only passed with a third. Shame! Mother was angry; “not angry,

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only grieved." I don't think! Damned liar! I hate you, devil! Get away! Dan says, get away. You *must* get away. I hate you! Dan says so. No, that's wrong; it's about living, isn't it, not Smalls? And mother's dead. It's 1924 now. She was in '16. Yes, about living . . .

"Living, liv-ing.

"Liv-iv-iv-ving.

"What fun, rhyming!

"Dead, head, bed, fed.

"Shed, read, lead, bed.

"Oo! Juliette's hair! It was soft against my face. My hands possessed her, touched and travelled.

"Travelled, gravelled . . .

"Bavelled, davelled . . .

"No, that's too difficult.

"'What fudge,' said the judge as he gave me a nudge, 'since you will not now budge, you shall very soon trudge through the sludge, till your bludge is one horrible smudge.'

"Huh, huh! That contains all the words in English ending in 'udge.'

"Juliette . . . Juli-ette.

"Juli-ette . . . Juli-ette . . .

"I'm king. Kiss me, sweetheart. Pretty child. Love me.

"I hate Dan. He was always so foully guilty in sexual matters. Why shouldn't I enjoy myself? Bloody wreck—that's what he was. Damn scientific research! 'When will America stop importing gold?' 'Why does a ball bounce?' Buy the

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Children's Encyclopædia and find out for yourself. Only a million pounds in penny instalments. . . . My God! Lawley . . . supposing Juliette's husband had ever found out?

"It'd be rather fun to tell him now . . . wouldn't matter. It would to Juliette, though. Good! I'd like to hurt her. Poor darling! She *is* a little lamb.

"My tender love, darling, make me cry. I do love you. My sweet . . . Ach! A millstone, that's what you are! Get rid of her . . . Oh, it hurts to hurt you, darling. But I must, you know. I can't help it.

"I like crying . . . Like feeling sorry for you. I like all feelings. I'm a voluptuary. I'll torture you! I'll . . . Ugh! Horrible! I'm an anti-social devil, I know. Oh, my beloved darling, don't hear me. It's not me, you know, darling face, beautiful, lovely one. Kill me. Tread on me! Hate me! But don't leave me!

"I don't really want to tell Lawley, even though it wouldn't make any difference to me.

"What? Why wouldn't it? Why not? . . . What?"

Ceasing to eavesdrop in light-headed lethargy, his ego demanding the utmost exertion on its behalf, and brooking no refusal, Roland himself, the actual drooping, dying Roland, suddenly burst into the conversation.

"Die? What do you mean? Good Lord! I did all that razor business, didn't I? Ugh! No. Roley can't die. He *can't*! Roley is always there.

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He must be. Roley! Roland! Quick! Stop! Wake up, fool! Do you know what you've done? Remember! Don't lie there phantasying, idiot!"

By an effort which seemed almost to destroy him, Roland derailed his mind, or what was left of it, from the lines along which it had been dizzily swaying, and wrenched it over to the actual. He saw everything—his past efforts to live, the prospects for the future—more lucidly and altogether differently from ever before. He could conquer his difficulties. There weren't any, even . . . They would disappear at a puff. He could conquer, conquer! What a fool he'd been! A horrible, *horrible* mistake! He must stop it . . . get back . . . of course.

"Oh! My God!" His gesture was not tragic, but ridiculous. He must live. He could do things, and with relish. "Stop it! Quick then! Stop the blood! Get help! *Live!*"

He made a movement to get up from the bed, but a weak, shuddering wisp of a groan floated from his lips. Two burning brands slid savagely along his arms . . .

"Must get up . . . Quick! Stop it, someone! Don't you realise? . . ."

He was screaming, though no sound was audible. Tears of mortification, frustration, wetted his eyelashes. "Nobody here . . . Nobody. Nobody. Nobody to explain to. I *must* live! Must! Younger brother—my attempts always spoiled. But I will! No, can't . . . It's comic. Damn them! Mother, help me! Ugh! Noth——"

This was The End.

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Yet . . .

He had not died? No, he was returning gradually to life. . . . Rather, he must have been brought back, for there, standing over him, was Dan. Pale, the flesh of his face sunken wherever no bones supported it, with those tired, well-known lines from nose to mouth, and the appeal in his eyes, which his lips never dared make, for peace and a renewal of affection, Dan looked down on him with hesitating gaze.

Dan had said something which, the moment after, Roland had forgotten. But Roland apparently had understood, for he was not surprised, when his own weak fingers moved across his body, that they encountered no blood. Daniel, it seemed—for his speech glided oddly out of Roland's memory—had that moment explained why. Janet must have found him. But how long had he been ill? He was still—or was it again?—on his own bed. No matter. Janet must have told Danny. Danny seemed to imply that that was right but that he had been coming to Roland anyhow, and Dan's face grew more embarrassed, more tender, more like his face of ten years ago. Anyhow, the explanation of his survival was of no interest to Roland at the moment. The question was ousted from his mind by its awakening to the blessed significance of his brother's presence.

"Oh, Danny. . . Have you come back? Danny, my lamb! Danny, my dear?"

"As a matter of fact, it does appear as if I were here, does it not?" Danny replied in a soft,

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quivering voice, disguising, as usual, downright pleasure in comically solemn, philosophic caution. "It's all right, little Roley-Poley; don't excite yourself. Danny is here all right this time. He must be, because he thinks; therefore, he is; and what he thinks, is, that he ought to buy a watch since he was a trifle late!"

"Danny! Has it been filthy? Have you had to do a lot of medical fussing? Sit down, and let me look at your face."

But Danny would not sit. He stood still, looking down on Roland, his embarrassment gone, a smile of friendliness for the future, fraternal willingness to obliterate the past, gently wavering round his mouth. Once again Roland felt positive that if he took the first step he would be rewarded, and that, though there was nothing to choose between the strength of their passions, it was still, as it had always been and would always be, easier for him to say simply what was in his mind.

"Danny darling! It's so juicy to see you again! Your movements, your comic ways, your face! Why won't you sit down, turnip? Obstinate as usual, Danny-Wanny! But you know the relief of being in the same room with you again—it's a gift of twenty years. I feel as if a yoke has been taken off my neck, or like being cured of lumbago, and finding myself able to unbend suddenly. Don't you feel that?"

But his brother merely looked softly at him.

Dan had sat down without Roley having noticed, and was leaning sideways on his arm at the foot of

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Roland's bed. Dan's eyes were shining and round, and his mouth round and small, ready to make some ridiculous under-statement of what his eyes told so clearly. But he sat listening without a word, bashful affection showing only in his gaze.

Roland was content that Dan should remain silent. Nothing mattered beside the fact that he was there. He, Roland, had Danny, his brother, again.

Roland's weakness seemed to transform itself into a light-headedness, and, lying in a twilit room, he felt elated, intoxicated, not exhausted. He wanted to laugh and crow like an infant, and put his arms round Danny's neck and kiss him as he used to do a hundred years ago when they met at the beginning of school holidays.

"You know—I wonder if you find the same," Roland ambled on, "it's not that I enjoy your company more than other people's, but that the pleasure is a different sort. Though it is greater, too.

"Dan, I love you more than I've ever loved any woman. I would pick them all up in one hand and throw them into the sea, to have you. One of the few sensible things dear Myra ever did was to make us brothers. I always felt with the women I loved that the experience was a pleasure—sometimes it felt almost mortally intense—still, a pleasure. But you are a necessity, like air. Say the word 'love' when you're talking about women and nothing really happens inside me. Say it in connection with you and me, and the whole of me is convulsed like the body of a dead animal being galvanised.

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"Oh, Danny! To be with you again! I feel like a Lebanonian lamb! Shall we go for a walking tour together some time soon? I should like that! You know, I feel more fond of you than I ever have since we were children and you used to let me pull your nose when you sat in that armchair in the dining-room at home after prayers on Saturday mornings, and Myra used to say, 'Roley, you mustn't behave like that to your elder brother!'"

"Say something, Dan-face."

Roland sighed, tired—though he had been speaking in a whisper—pressing his head back against the pillow, looking blissfully at his brother. But Danny just sat looking back at him with shining eyes and a small round mouth. He looked pale, and in the dark his outline was scarcely visible. Only on his cheek and eye were two pale high-lights.

"Danny-Wanny," repeated Roland, luxuriating in the knowledge that he was talking at that moment in his own flat to his own brother, "Danny, wake up, you sausage! Say something!"

"I say," he added, "lend me a hand. I want to lean forward."

And he stretched out one hand for his brother to pull him up by. Daniel's hand came out to help him, a thin brown, shapely hand, with slightly crooked fingers, and convex nails. It came towards Roland to meet his outstretched arm. Roland pushed himself forward with his other arm, which was behind him, and moved his hand to grasp his brother's arm above the elbow. Their two limbs overlapped, were alongside, drew close, and touched.

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Then Daniel's became filmy, unsubstantial, and without strength. Roland had relaxed the muscles of his body as he leaned forward, expecting his weight to be taken by his brother, and, as Daniel's arm faded into blank, Roland fell forward with a croaking sound and his brother vanished.

VIII

ROLAND was lying on his face, on the floor of the sitting-room, his body twisted uncomfortably sideways from its fall forward from the armchair.

He raised himself, sat back, and looked at the wall. He was alone. He turned slowly round to one side, then the other. His brother was not in the room. He himself was not in his bedroom. He touched his arms, felt his legs, looked at the chair cover. His limbs were unscratched, the chair unstained. He was not dead.

But his brother was not in the room, not in the flat. Nor had he been.

Roland suddenly saw, lying on the rug in the corner near the door, his rucksack. He looked at his boots and clothes; they were the boots and clothes in which he had gone down to the cottage. They were the clothes in which he had been motored home by Janet.

He lay back. A peg was being placed against his heart and hit by rhythmic blows into and through it. The blood was ebbing from his brain; he felt sick. He leaned still in his chair, while the hammer continued to hit the blunt chisel into his left side.

"So it was—not—Dan—after all," he said aloud, trying to clamp his mind down to the discovery.

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"Oh, Danny," he cried, with a soft sigh, "my darling brother, shall I never see you again?"

"No. Never."

"I shall never see you again. Good-bye. I know it now."

He sat.

Again he felt exhausted. His heart sank, sank; but lower, more heavily, than ever before. He was in despair.

He looked at the wall. It did not change.

He got on to his feet, walked to the door and upstairs. His feet knocked against the carpet-rods, which clinked as he went up—noisily because he was indifferent, more loudly because he felt defiant. He went into the bathroom, picked up his shaving things, walked into his bedroom, and shut the door.

He took off his coat. He knew that the top of the dressing-table would be level with his chest, but that, by standing on tiptoe for the moment and lifting his elbow, he would be able to thrust his left hand, with the palm up, into the topmost open drawer. He pushed the drawer hard to upon the knuckles with his knee. His hand thus wedged, he pressed his forearm down into the horizontal. With the blade of his razor he approached the dark canals in his wrist, placed the edge lengthwise above the radial artery, jabbed down and in, and drew the blade along his bare arm halfway towards his elbow.

The sensation of the parting flesh under the incredible sharpness of the razor reminded him, as he knew it would, of tearing rubber. For one moment he could see the gaping cliffs of flesh, a

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clean white, before the dark red welled up from the cleft. As a swelling soap bubble clings to, curls and lolls over, the edge of a clay pipe, so did the dark and secret blood mount level with the surface of its white banks, cling to, curl over them, and disappear.

Wasting no time, Roland loosened the drawer, took out his hand, and inserted the other. With his now streaming left hand he repeated the operation on his right. Then he tore off his socks and trousers and attacked the veins in his legs and thighs. He fetched a glass of water, and, ignoring the streams of blood down his limbs, changed into cool pyjamas. He pulled back the blankets and, covering himself with a sheet and an eiderdown, lay down on the bed. Knowing that if he moved later the half-congealed wounds would tear and wake him, he relaxed into a comfortable position on his back, swallowed a bromide sleeping draught, turned out the light, and shut his eyes.

From the moment when he had left his armchair, not a sound had come from him.

Now he talked, making no attempt to do so in a way older than that of the child of eight he felt.

"Mummy, my darling, come to Roley. Help Roley, Mummy. I'm unhappy. It's so horrid without you. I want you between me and everybody badly. You and Dan be friends!

"Won't you, Dan? Please! It hurts so when you're not. Only for a little! Everything is so much easier when you're both friends. Do, do, until this stops.

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"Mummy, I'll love you, if I can. Only, Dan, you know, makes everything so difficult.

"Good night, anyway; I'm going to sleep now. "Please, God, bless father and mother and La and Dan and Janet, Grandmother, Uncle Myer, Uncle Freddie an' Aunt Lia, and help me to be a good boy."

"Oh, Gawd, buck up! I hope it's soon over. I want to go to sleep. I *won't* think of living! Buck up, buck up! Finish this off!"

His mouth felt dry. The darkness was all round. Thought was beginning to cease. The pressure of his body on the bed was hardly sensible, and he did not know where his arms were. His mouth felt dry. His head said, "Glass of water—by your side."

Then a crack, a splintering tinkle. Pittering drips splashed past his ear. A sting fell upon his eye, another, another. A cool, cold snake slid past his nostril, near his mouth.

He curled out his tongue, but he could not reach the edge of cold ivory pressing on his cheek. He could not lift his head, and his body had left him. He felt nothing lower than his chin, where the snake's head had reached.

His mouth felt dry, drier. Again the cool, cold liquid touched his cheek, passed over it, dripped on to the pillow. Again he pursued the water with his tongue, but it could not reach.

He turned his head, the water flowed into the dent which his head made in the pillow, he could feel the water between the pillow and his cheek.

Cold liquid. He would have the cold liquid in

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his mouth. Tasteless crystal; cool water. It would be in his mouth again soon.

Suddenly his body was alive once more. Knobs of burning iron were pushed into his legs and arms, consumed him, burned him alive, then faded. His body had obeyed. He had turned over.

But, too weak to regulate his body's effort, he had turned, past his side, on to his face. So, unwillingly, he lay. Now his face was against the pillow and he found the hollow. But the cool crystal was gone. The pillow was wet but warm, soft yet solid. Cold liquid crystal was not there.

His tongue crept over the damp patch of pillow, which gave off tiny hairs, like blotting paper. Iron knobs were hot now only every few moments, but his mouth felt dry. A singing was in his head, his tongue was on the blotting paper, and his ears were being beaten by rhythmic hammers. The hammers grew heavier. The singing became a roar, neither intermittent nor rhythmic, but unceasing. The blows of hammers were replaced by the fixed pressure of bands, bars, loads, mountains, the world. There was no silence, though the roar was moving away. Another world was pressing on the first world, another world on that.

Dry velvet and pumice stone were creeping on his tongue, which began to grow bigger. The velvet was soft, warm, and dry; but it blocked his nostrils, was adhering to his tongue, creeping underneath it, touching the roof of his mouth. Something was nipping his vocal cords, pressing deep into his throat on either side of his Adam's apple. The skin

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seemed to grow elastic and give way, allowing these pincers to drive into his throat and grip savagely at the tender nerves, so preventing him from calling out, or sucking down cold air or water to quench the internal fire that raged between his ribs. The skin seemed to break completely, the instruments of torture which had been attacking his ears, his throat, his nostrils, and his mouth, all clashing together at the root of his tongue, and searing, rending it to tatters.

His tongue grew bigger, the area of the surface covered with velvet, larger and larger.

He was being buried alive. He could not move.

"Don't move. Lie still; it will pass. It doesn't really hurt. You needn't let it. You can make it not hurt at all. You can, if you choose, not feel it."

Only a slow, terrific movement, like a planet being levered an inch in a million years by a geared clockwork of a million wheels, whirring, spinning, tearing round, a million revolutions a second.

Very slowly, very, very, very slowly.

Sound goes. Movement goes. Touch goes.

It did not really hurt; it did not hurt at all.

